

# JAYLIT

ISSUE 03  
JANUARY 2021



THE JOURNAL OF AFRICAN YOUTH LITERATURE

ESSAYS • POETRY • PLAYS • SHORT STORIES • TRANSLATIONS  
50+ WORKS • 20 WRITERS • 6 COUNTRIES

Forward by **Kwela**  
of **Kwani Experience**

Part II in graphic  
comic series **Kite**  
by **Olabode Ajiboye**

#AFRICANSTORIESMATTER



# JAY LIT

ISSUE 03  
JANUARY 2021



## THE JOURNAL OF AFRICAN YOUTH LITERATURE

*The Journal of African Youth Literature* (JAY LIT) is a non-profit initiative providing African youths with a platform to publish their writing. We also publish writing by other individuals that falls under the general theme of African youth. We publish content from across Africa in all languages used on the continent.

Submissions for the fourth issue open on 1 March 2021.  
Please consult the author guidelines on the website carefully before submitting.

Cover image:

Kwelagobe Sekele ([@kwelathe4th](#)) – musicologist, producer,  
and lead vocalist of Kwani Experience ([@kwani.experience](#)).  
Photographed by Kgomotso Neto Tleane ([@kgomotso\\_net](#))

*Read more about Kwelagobe on page 3.*

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# EDITORIAL FOREWORD

As I sit down to write this, I am struck by the terrible sadness that I feel and that surrounds me. It is the holiday season, but there is little joy. We remain under the burden of the pandemic and we are filled with anxiety for our loved ones' health and wellbeing, job prospects, and the future of the economy.

It is easy to look around for someone to blame in such a situation. However, we are all responsible not to spread the virus as well as dissent and fear. Strengthen your communities. As the gap between the rich and the poor widens and we feel desperate and isolated from resource access, whether this is financial or social resources, we must continue to resist selfish thinking.

We must try to be the change we want to see in the world. Be aware of what is still within your means to do and try your best to do it. Take the time to reflect on what and who is most important to you and cherish that.

Offer to hold space for others and use the opportunity to share your views after you have listened carefully. It is hard to ask for help because it accompanies feelings of having failed, so don't wait for others to come to you in desperation and when it is too late. Offer support now if you can and leave aside greed. We must keep actively choosing a hopeful and resilient attitude.

I am thrilled to present poetry translations from Urdu and Mauritian Kreole into English by **Kaushar**

**Auleear**, along with a collection of her English poetry. We are always excited to see literature in diverse languages used in the African Union. We also love **Nkhensani Maluleke's** poem, 'Ntombhi ya mu Tsonga', with its creative use of Xitsonga idioms.

**Mbasa Tsetsana** shares his fascinating play, *Thula Mntanam*, which sweeps across time from the South African contemporary political context back into the 19th-century history of the AmaXhosa nation, creating an extended socio-political metaphor in which the past and present are interpreted in light of each other.

I would like to highlight some of my favourite poems from issue three. **Emmanuel Mtema's** 'The Marriage Proposal' reflects on African traditions which emphasise marital commitment as a bond and act of trust which reaches beyond the couple and becomes a reciprocating responsibility towards larger family groups. 'Eyes That Look Are Many, Eyes That See Are Few' by **Gideon Idudje** is admittedly a poem I did not initially understand and which I still return to, finding more depth each time. This remarkable piece is one of the most complex we have ever featured. I hope it becomes the subject of close reading and study outside the Journal.

**Jerusha Marete's** 'A place they call home' is a powerful narrative poem displaying genuine empathy and keen insight into the situation of African children. In my view, this poem's critical achievement is in countering the unidimensional object-of-pity trope. The poem is executed in Jerusha's unique perspicacious style, which enriches our understanding of human suffering beyond the visual sign.

'Kibera' by **Beaton Galafa** and 'Mother' by **N.E. Adams** have similar effects, offering sources to enhance our understandings of the individual experiences of young Africans which should inform whatever we do in relation to them.

**Lerise Johnson's** 'they made a toy out of me' has striking imagery revealing the stifling position of the objectified person. Have a careful read of 'This Home' by **Patrick Okoi** to spot my favourite line of verse from the entire issue three poetry collection. My clue is 'meta'. **Richard Chilango** offers his refreshingly positive feminist perspective in the epistolary poem 'Melanin Arsenal'. Chilango is one author to watch in the literary space.



# EDITORIAL FOREWORD

Young men are understanding what feminism really is, taking women's concerns seriously, and realising that it is not a threat to them. Feminism started with women's concerns, but it has grown tremendously since its early achievements, and it has for many years been about really caring for and understanding everyone.

True feminism is certainly a relief in the context of the many forms of discrimination we face, sometimes blatant and especially from the older generations who do not care about youths or equality among the gender, race and age groups, and who should be leading by example. It is really worthwhile to get to know what feminism is really about if you don't already know the key theories and movements.

We acknowledge the apparent gender bias in our collection of five short stories for this issue. They are all women, but this was unintentional. Initially, we received fewer submissions from women in all genres. We raised this on social media, which seems to have prompted the subsequent rapid response from female narrators. Note, however, that both visual stories and both plays in this issue are by gents. We strive to ensure proportional equity across demographics. You can help us achieve this by encouraging submissions from groups that you note are underrepresented and we ask that you also bring this to our attention so that we can try to address it. If possible, please help us reach out, especially to those from rural areas, and from countries and languages not yet featured in *JAY Lit*.

The touching narrative of 'The Present Past: Lina's Story' by **Phindile Gumede** is about a school-going girl's experiences at the height of Apartheid, inspired by the author's mother. **Clara Jack's** 'Millennium Children' centres on the experiences of Generation Z Nigerians during and beyond lockdown.

'The Street Kid's Ballad', written by **Bongiwe Maphosa**, follows a boy living on the streets in South Africa over the extremely trying period which continues since the coronavirus outbreak. Despite his ordeal, the story ends with hope for the child's future. The stories by **Nathi Poswa** and **Enobong Etuk** deal with sexual orientation and domestic gender relations respectively, adeptly zooming in on and faithfully rendering personal experiences in the African context.

**Kudzai Mhangwa's** play, *Come By Here*, is a bold, unexpected sci-fi comedy we would love to see produced for the stage or screen. **Olabode Ajiboye** presents us with Part II of his *Kite* comic, following on from Part I in issue 1 of *JAY Lit*. "New Comedy" in a Landscape of Quasi-Theocracy' also follows on **Gary Louw's** essay from issue 1, reflecting on what has happened since his controversial artwork went viral and presenting some of his more recent work.

We thank all our contributors from this and previous issues. Rather than just wishing you a prosperous 2021, we will be working to make this a reality through our efforts to secure funding and our strategies. We have recently focused on forging partnerships with individuals and organisations with similar goals to the Journal.

We would thus like to thank **Marie-Catherine Ehuy** from the Africa Centre London for her support and interest in seeing our authors receive greater exposure. We hope this relationship will lead to more rewarding opportunities for African youth creatives.

**Bronwyn King**

*JAY Lit* Managing Editor

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# ABOUT OUR COVER STAR

Our appreciation goes to Kwelagobe Sekele (pictured right) ([@kwelathe4th](#)) for being our cover star for issue 3.

Kwela is a musicologist, producer, and lead vocalist of the Kwani Experience, a sextet that has achieved cult status in South Africa. He is photographed here by KgomoNeto Tleane ([@kgomoto\\_netto](#)).

Kwela wrote a beautiful message for our storytellers: 'May the stories come through us and write themselves. May we write the Self into the stories. May we bet on better versions of ourselves, who we really are, from where we are, with what we are present-ed with. Be calm, as we become.'

Click [here](#) to listen to Kwela's solo project work on Spotify. Our personal favourite is the song 'Shooting Star'. Here is an excerpt of the lyrics:

*'cause ain't nobody  
Like a nobody  
Corporate body  
Or lifeless body  
From Soweto (to) Sirius B  
To Sombrero Galaxy  
From where you came  
From nothing  
Story of your becoming  
Day your mama felt something  
Made your papa into something  
Love is plenty  
And you're worthy  
To be happy  
Feel free  
When you feel  
Squeezed as mp3  
Here's a melody  
Sing with me*

## Kwelagobe Sekele

African musical storyteller



## Join our Ambassador Programme

Would you be interested in helping us promote *JAY Lit* to other authors from your home country? If you want to see your country and home language represented in the Journal, being an Ambassador is a great way to make it happen! We want to address the following through this initiative:

- We receive fewer **submissions from non-South Africans**, especially from nations **outside Sub-Saharan Africa**. We are determined to change that and are seeking ways to reach other African writers. You can start simply by telling your friends on social media about the Journal.
- We want more **submissions that aren't in English**, though we welcome those too. Perhaps you can help us reach those who are writing or could write in languages such as Swahili, Chichewa, Zulu, etc. All African languages are welcome, as well as those spoken widely in certain regions such as French and Portuguese.
- We are also interested in the way youths mix and use various languages together in practice (**multilingualism**) and capturing that for **cultural preservation**.
- Another major challenge we face is **reaching rural areas**. Can you reach out to those in outlying areas in your country or region? Sharing info about *JAY Lit* with high schools, teachers, libraries, community forums, etc. in rural areas can ensure we are more inclusive and give opportunities to those in disadvantaged areas.



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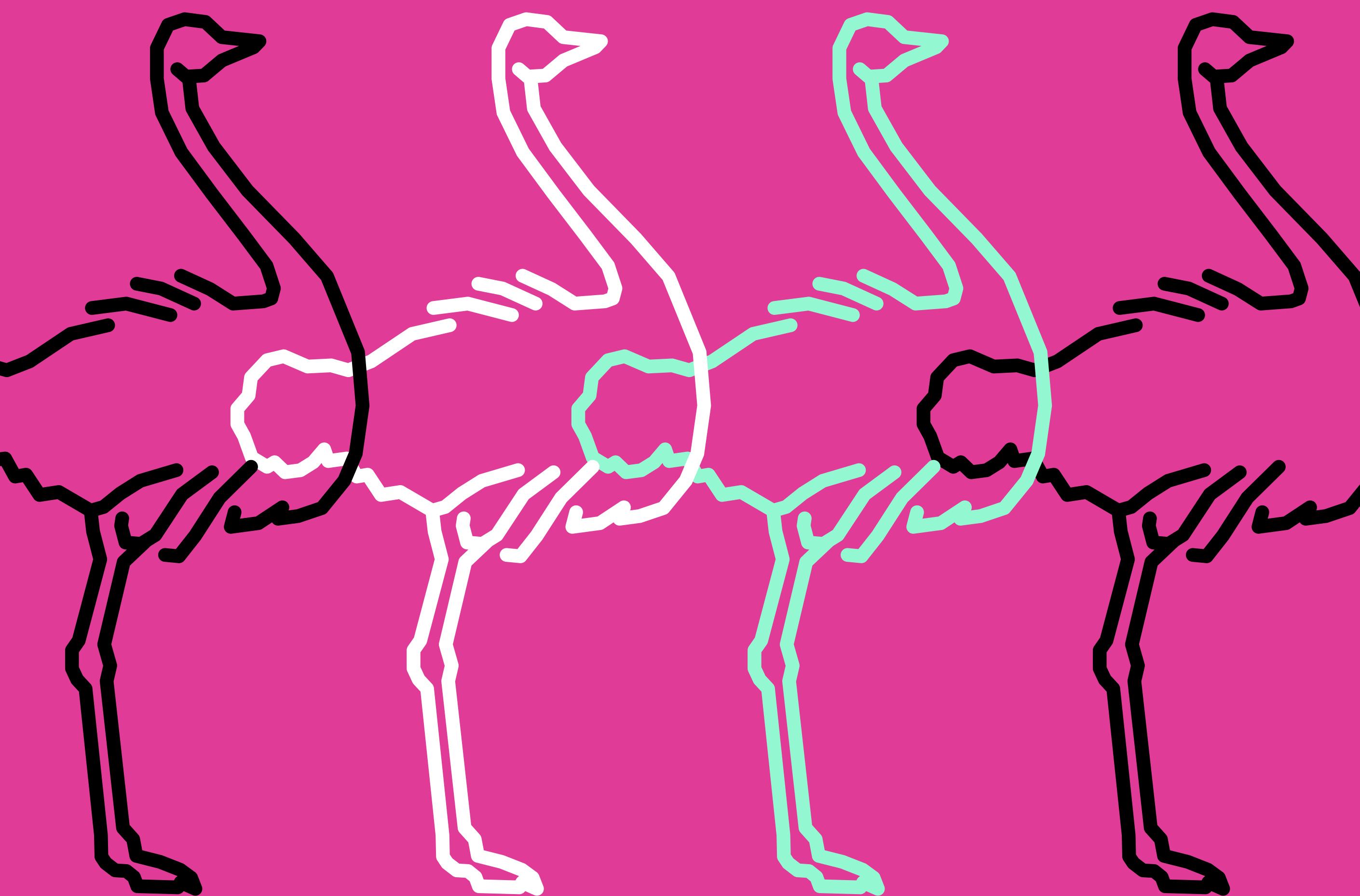
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THE JOURNAL OF  
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# POETRY





# Kaushar Edoo Bibi Auleear



*Kaushar Edoo Bibi Auleear is from Riviere du Rempart, Mauritius. She is 24 years old and started writing and performing poetry in 2019. Mauritian Kreole is her mother tongue and preferred language for performance. She also writes in English, French and Urdu. Kaushar has had several opportunities to perform, including on stage at a national slam competition in Mauritius in which she was part of the winning team; at the Festival Kreol, a national celebration of Mauritian culture; and for the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation.*

*We are proud to present a collection of her poems in English, as well as two more poems by Kaushar in the Translations section from [page XX](#); one in Mauritian Kreole and another in Urdu, both with English translations.*





## Be free

Be free

Be free to fail

Be free to avail bizarre opportunities

Be free to play with your creativity

Be free to slay among normal ones

Be free to sway your hips to the tune of freedom and uncalculated decisions

Be free to dislocate your brain for some time

Be free to relocate your heart

Somewhere more peaceful

Somewhere where you feel at ease

Tease yourself with some more awkwardness

Strive to push every limit

Do not even think to quit

Because when the fire of obsession is lit

It burns all that comes in its way

Pray to become stronger

Not only in the form of biceps and triceps

But also to control your urges

Pray to stop yourself to dominate your mortal body

Pray to deepen your thoughts and strengthen your soul

## Not my fault

To be born unwantedly

Not my fault to have fertilised the ovum

Not my fault again

To be a victim of disdain

My dear

I know I am not your dear

Here I am

What a destiny

I will die before being born

I will be torn to pieces

And it will not be done easy

Bit by bit

I will disappear

From my home

Which I considered my own

I will be torn

Before taking my first breath

It was not my fault

To be alive

## Fight strong

Fight so strong till your last breath

that death postpones its appointment

vent out your weird wishes

wake up your dead soul

Pour out your heart's craziest desires

It's time to be the talk of the town

It's time to wear your crown

and drown purposely into the deep ocean

carefree

believe me

you decide your limits

Along the waves of sacrifice

Along the dance of a dice

Open your arms

welcome the risk

fresh like the mist

like you've never tasted failure

Collect the bits and pieces of losses

Toss the coin once again

Let it decide your fate



# Kaushar Edoo Bibi Auleear

## Door

I closed the door long ago  
So that I could glow again  
And blow away the rusted emotions

I closed the door long ago to breathe in some fresh vibes  
I want to be taken into the arms of the winds  
Like the dry leaves  
I want to be soothed  
By the moonlight  
Teasing my face  
I tied a knot  
Not to remind myself of something  
In my to-do list  
But to play with my mind  
Trying to break the clot

I put a stop sign  
On my mind  
To rewind blissful moments  
I drank some wine  
Not to blind myself with short-lived ecstasy  
But to relive some alive moments

## I don't mind

I don't mind looking out for you  
in every being who cares

I don't mind believing that you might return  
Even if it takes countless moments  
or weeks even decades

I don't mind staying alive  
Just to hear you again

I don't mind creating my own happiness inside my nest  
built upon the remains from our sweet conversations

I don't mind being called a lady drowned in sadness  
I don't mind crying sometimes just to keep myself strong

I am fed up convincing myself that I moved on  
I thought I forgot you completely when I held someone else's hands  
I thought your memories won't torture me again when  
I kissed someone else's lips  
I tried to bury you inside my heart so you won't emerge again

My foolish self still calls you around two in the morning  
When I can't find peace in sleep

My first love is a sweet curse for me  
That will never leave my side



## **I have the fire**

I have the fire  
And the desire to acquire  
The power to get out of dire situations  
For I am capable of creation  
Don't let me suffer in pain  
For I can gain  
That you can't explain

Don't look at me in disdain  
For I will push my limits to the extremity of my nature  
I will survive dictators  
And get more powerful  
By the end of the day  
Although my stomach may not be full  
I will fulfil the desires of my heart

No matter how hurt I am  
I shall be grateful for everyone who supports  
And not be hateful of the criticisers  
critics are ingredients of success  
Because of them I rise again

No matter how daunting  
Life may become  
No matter how many bad surprises come forward  
I will rise and view them as rewards

I am on my guard  
I have the power to protect  
And not the shameful eyes to neglect  
Don't question my sanity  
For I can leave it aside  
Because I take pride for being insane  
Give me wings so I can fly  
Not a ring  
To symbolise your possession  
I belong to myself

My self demands loneliness  
To escape your barriers  
To bury your negativity  
I vibe with my soul  
I answer the call of my existence  
On my own

I wear my crown  
Not to reign over a kingdom  
But to hold wisdom  
I am bold  
And cold  
Always told to be silent  
Because my words are sharp  
They prick  
Mercilessly  
They burn  
Savagely



# Emmanuel Chitsanzo Mtema



*Emmanuel Chitsanzo Mtema lives in Zomba, Malawi. He is committed to social change through teaching adolescents. He writes poetry and Christian devotions. His book Kasupe Devotions is available on Amazon.*

*Mtema's poems have been widely published locally and internationally including in LOCKDOWN 2020, On the Road Anthology, Walking the Battlefield Anthology, The Scarlet Anatomy, and Nthanda Review. Two of his poems were translated into Spanish and appear in Libero America Journal.*





## The Marriage Proposal

The sun was about to sink down the valley  
Showing her dull shiny forehead  
And her fingertips touching the treetops  
As her long legs stretched across the Lake Nyasa beach

I sat on a mat,  
Eyeing the horizon walls  
My legs stretched  
I felt powerless knowing what was coming

In no time ululations filled the air  
As uncles and a group of women  
Marched to where I was seated  
I knew it would take more than courage  
To lay down my intentions  
For the woman I wanted to marry  
In front of her kinsmen

Masked, they arrived  
The prosecutor threw a glance at me  
And motioned for me to speak  
I mumbled  
“Your seed will be safe in my hands.  
Lobola is over there with my uncle.”

## Remember me

Do you remember  
How teasing your eyes were  
When we kissed  
That night?  
Time stopped ticking  
And the dark skies dissolved into a smile

Fast the days fled  
When our love drift was a-water  
Then you shrank from love battles  
And life-woe bidding you obeyed  
My Strife unremitting  
And you slowly carved my heart  
Throwing away the fragments of sense I had left  
Here I am crying to the wind  
As if my tears will not turn into clouds  
Only to come back as raindrops

With you my African queen,  
I must tread this path (still)  
For “Courage is not the absence of fear”  
Such as I hope you would bring me relief in my sorrow  
To relive that moment of old  
Perhaps, a spark can form – again.  
Upon which a seed of love can bud – again



# Emmanuel Chitsanzo Mtema

## Wildflower

Her background is tainted  
She has graffiti-marked walls  
And her ground is inhabited  
By wheeling Beelzebub,  
Who keeps bosom-bursting secrets

She sets herself ablaze  
Though she only has a small flicker inside her  
She is heavily oppressed  
Yet in her hurting she radiates a small glow  
On which tender words are scribbled  
Defining a blooming flower  
That limps and chimes a way through  
Knitting a web of virtue, like a spider

Oh, daughter of Africa  
The dark men-oriented society  
Can't comprehend her illumination  
A heritage rock backs her up  
And a great force surrounds her  
Power such that we can't reckon with  
Strength is her character

# Jerusha Kananu Marete



*Jerusha Kananu Marete from Kenya is the author of the power-packed anthology *Echoes of Military Souls* (2020), available directly from the author ([jerushakananu@gmail.com](mailto:jerushakananu@gmail.com)), or from Amazon. Her preferred literary mode is the narrative poem, as she has flawlessly executed in this collection for JAY Lit. Jerusha is a masters student in literature and theatre at Kenyatta University. She is a teacher, performing artist, and film and theatre enthusiast. Jerusha is also the loving mother of her son Emmanuel. Her poetry has been published in the Best New African Poets Anthology, Liberoamerica, the Kenya Military Academy's magazine Reconnoitre, and African Writers Caravan, among others.*



# Jerusha Kananu Marete

## I craved peace

I whispered, hoping it will crawl to the bush  
Auch! An arrow fell on its side, my heart bled!  
Getting from the bush was courting death  
The innocent child started playing with the arrow  
I still whispered, but clothed in God's suit the baby played on

Lying next to it were bodies chopped  
From a distance bodies wrapped in cloth tied to long poles  
Screams of women being raped echoed in the desert  
My heart was lame!  
What was the use of fighting for soil they soaked with blood?  
Another arrow missed the child's head by a whisker  
I threw my camera, crawled towards the baby

Three years gone by, I watch him draw  
He draws dead bodies, guns and arrows  
He doesn't talk or smile  
I lost my arms but I am teaching this poor soul  
Teaching him to draw a dove  
How would peace look in his silent troubled world?

## Rebels

Crying for our crushed egos  
Mourning our stripped heroes  
You have tramped on our rights  
You have misused our nights  
Lines have been crossed  
Tired of fingers always crossed

Starvation has been on motto  
Intimidation has been your mission  
Insubordination has been your chorus  
Discrimination has been your menu

Tables have turned  
Return our meat and bone  
Retain our hearts  
Revolution needs no hearts  
We will make our way to your big bellies  
We will empty the content  
You will no longer be potent



## A place they call home

Get out of my class  
Growls the mad murderous miss  
But teacher...rr, I have a story to tell  
You need a lash and slash grass  
But teacher ...please I have a story to tell  
Out of my sight, go tell to the grass

It's five I walk for five miles  
My back aches my hands in pain  
The scorching sun burns  
My plastic shoes burn too  
Burning blisters, I walk in pain

Its seven find myself at a place they call home  
The silence says the looming danger  
I cook clean and grab my book  
Mom is swollen she may soon burst  
Bang!! The door comes crumbling down  
A staggering figure stares and glare  
The swollen mum suddenly growls  
How did I marry this piece of cabbage?

Swish  
Like lightening a glass passes my face  
Auch! It cuts my mum across the jaws  
Blood  
Splash and splash across the room  
Things are flying on air, its bang and clang  
I lie I hide I squat I try and dodge  
Closer they are the fighting mates  
They bite, shove smash and punch  
Mum is down she cries out in pain  
I tremble scream I am covered in blood  
Daaad!!! Don't... Aaaaah!! I can't see a chair has hit my face  
Oh God take me away from this den  
In agony I coil on the balcony with biting cold

I wipe my swollen face at the face of dawn  
From five I write a hundred phrasal verbs  
I will be at peace in school with murderous miss  
It's mathematics lesson my stomach aches  
Mr Sam had given fifty sums?  
Shut up and get out of class he shouts  
My story again I have to tell to grass  
At lunch I am sad I lack the meal card

It's five I walk for five miles  
My back aches my hands in pain  
The scorching sun burns  
My plastic shoes burn too  
Burning blisters, I walk in pain

I find myself at the place they call home  
'Hurry! Hurry! Neighbor hurry come  
Mum please breathe'  
I press her chest in vain  
In hospital bed she lies covered in blood  
Where do I go from here? I can't tell dad  
Their world has grown vicious and mean



# Jerusha Kananu Marete

## My love

If you were a song, I would dance to your every beat  
If you were a script, I would master my lines overnight  
You came to my life and the dead chatter became alive  
I was a star whose light had dimmed, thanks to you my star glows  
And all melancholy trimmed, Juliet was not as loved as I

Am I not a prisoner who defies all liberty from thy bondage?  
Take me to your arms as I caress your palms  
Let us run away from any obstacle to our own world  
Where the snow is our bed and stars sing for us  
Hold my waist let us dance tango under the moon  
My love, you are my greatest treasure  
You are mine, I am yours, let us dance our happiness out

Let our love glow and light all the dim  
Let Romeos and Juliets envy us  
As you carry me to our dreams in love streams

## Gone

So much I long for days long gone  
When you used to be there and the jokes we used to share  
You went away so fast cheated by the lust  
You are now in the past the tears I shed and hopes I had

Bitter beaten and broken to pieces  
I walk like a wacko remembering the wacky jokes we shared  
You followed a path rarely trodden  
I watched you climb the mountain in a fountain of pain  
From incurable disease born out of desire  
Ahead of me you retire left me in need so dire  
Your infidelity I forgive and my hopes I give  
For our children to receive



## Rose

Show me your ways  
I am a rose hidden in my days  
From rummaging rough friends  
Can't keep up with their camouflaging trends  
They smile as they suck suck suck suck  
They shout as I am stuck, stuck stuck stuck

Ooh sweet rose, give me thy dose  
Teach me oh red rose how to shine in the midst of foes  
Their smell and language so foul  
I want to keep mine soul

Sweet rose loved and plucked  
Teach me to be a rose  
Yet retain my thorns  
To avoid their horns

## Newborn with teeth

Hail you! Newborn with teeth  
You have torn your mothers apart  
Your fathers wail in streets  
Now you are biting the babysitter  
Newborn with teeth, must you bite our rights?

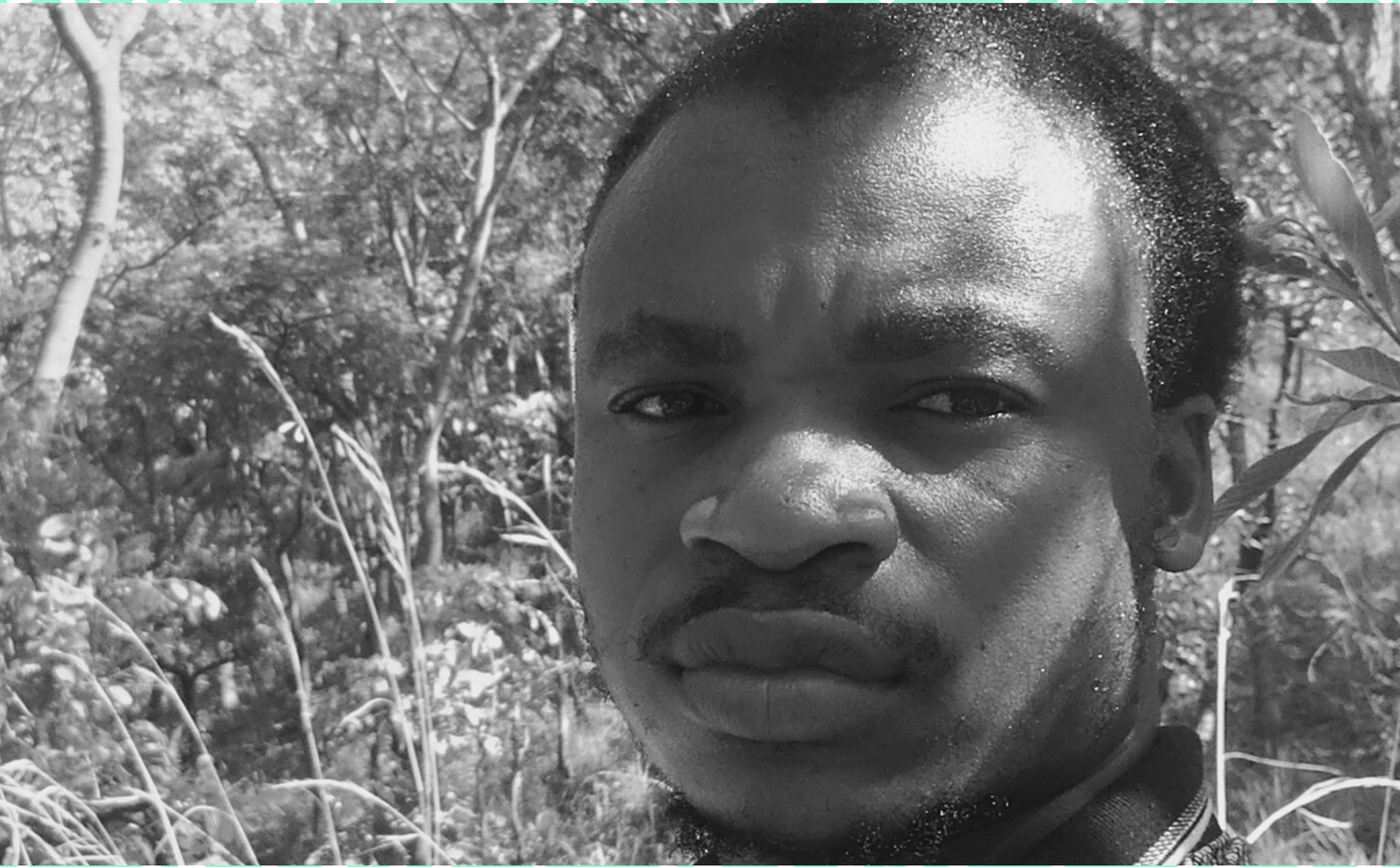
We saw your teeth and knew it was a bad omen  
To put an abnormal child in power  
But we dared the devil and said to hell  
We stood by you, used our scathed Palms to hide your teeth  
Newborn with teeth, you have bitten a court order

Newborn with teeth, you promised us  
That your teeth will not grow longer  
Until you get of age, but, Alas!  
You are a month old, the premolars, molars and canines  
Lack space, your laughing teeth  
Have stopped laughing they are outside  
The ignoramus thinks you are laughing  
But we in the know know that your teeth are more  
Than your mouth can accommodate  
Newborn with teeth, must you bite your tongue?

How we wish we had not hidden your abnormal teeth  
With our torn inner wears  
But we thought you would by some chance  
By God, Karma or both behave yourself  
Since you knew you had a fault  
But, alas, newborn with teeth  
Stop biting our behinds, we can no longer sit down



# Beaton Galafa



*Beaton Galafa is a Malawian writer of poetry, fiction and nonfiction. His work appears in Fourth & Sycamore, The Blue Tiger Review, Corpses of Unity/Cadavres de l'Unité, Walking the Battlefield: An Anthology of Malawian Poetry on the COVID-19 Pandemic, among others. As an educator, he has taught in international schools and tutored Literature and Linguistics at the University of Malawi.*





## It was the sun that spoke

when we hid in the forests  
leaves fell dry – flat on the surface  
as tigers and deer ran to faraway mountains  
with waters drowning in cracks to dispatch fish.  
we did not even cry.  
meandering  
forth &  
back  
in search of rills bubbling  
we knelt where our ancestors had – before floods  
washed them away with civilization  
to where gods turned their backs  
on them.

## In the morning

when flowers blossom,  
the sun's tenderness bouncing off waters  
molten lava flowing through earth  
and fogs meandering over the hills,  
the cock crows and night birds run.

the man in the streets whistles,  
wrestling in a tag with a stump fragmented  
to warm the town when the sun backs off again,  
the woman and a baby on her lump stretch their arms  
for a life from hearts of kindness  
withered from the steam heat birthed at the centre.

the president pauses for a photo with another award,  
tongue reaching for his nose like a dying cow.  
as, disenfranchised, flies stare at the voter's pot.

## Pass on the flame

Remember,  
to guard the embers  
our kids will  
find this flame;  
heroes lived uninterrupted:  
when they invaded,  
they made a ball for the kids  
from their severed heads,  
swam in blood  
across worlds  
to serve terror  
on the tables of natives.

## Death race

I will go first  
before devils & demons  
to tell God they raped  
and enslaved his image  
before prophets & wise men;  
they reaped & ripped  
before queens & knights;  
they stole his lands,  
fooled him with a dummy  
and sailed away,  
chiefs waving a bag of salt  
in the air.



# Beaton Galafa

# Kibera

I have a future tucked away  
in chuckholes of the dusty paths  
where a kid drowns hands to kill thirst  
when there is mud and death floating  
in a waste yard waiting for vultures  
to wrestle for bones and rotting bread  
in a gladiator's ring erected from stripes of party cloth  
hanging below shadows of skyscrapers from a distance  
in the smoke fuming from dumps  
and the burning car by the man with a panga  
defending the honour in our heroes  
with rats running over pots starving  
in cold nights at the foot of Mt. Kenya.



Nursery school wall and street  
Kibera in Nairobi, Kenya  
Kibera is the largest urban slum in Africa

Photo by Neaj Jean  
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# Lerise Johnson



*Lerise Johnson is a 19-year-old BSc Biochemistry student at Nelson Mandela University. A poem of hers was published in the 2019 English Alive anthology, and many of her pieces were featured in her school's annual magazine. She has been an avid reader and creative writer since a very young age when her grandmother first started teaching her to read and write. Besides writing, her other passions include music, nature and photography. She can be found on Instagram and Twitter @lerisejohnson*



# Lerise Johnson

## wine stained teeth

wine stained teeth  
remind me of  
berries in my backyard  
we used to pick and play with when we were young  
such a mess  
everything stained red  
every time you left you said  
that you would visit again.  
But when you stopped I still kept hope  
that you'd always return to your second home  
not just a friend, more family  
but you left me alone with too many secrets to keep

my living room  
still reminds me of  
pillow fights, blanket forts  
you had my toys, I had yours  
sleep at my house after every Christmas day  
so many nights  
everything was a game  
every time you won you said  
that you would teach me to play it better again.  
But when things got serious  
I didn't think you'd mean that  
not just a friend, more than I could see  
but you left me with too many memories to read

now wine stained teeth  
just remind me of  
all the bad blood  
from when we used to be young

## Colours

can I ask, what colours are the rooms between your walls?  
the brick ones you built up to save you from the storms?  
the ones you hide away in when your eyes are open  
the ones whose doors you close when it feels like your soul is being broken

(I just want to know)

what colours are the rooms between your walls?  
are they brown like the stones people throw?  
or white with red streaks like your blood on the snow?

(it's just a question)



what colours are the rooms between your walls?  
purple like the bruises from all the "falls"?  
or blue like the ocean you're drowning in?

(I'll ask again)

what colours are the rooms between your walls?  
black like the painted windows behind the boards?  
or are they grey like the clouds you're so afraid of?

(please tell me what colours the walls are made of)

what colours are the rooms between your walls?  
are they orange like the flames that burn you?  
or yellow like the little light you're holding on to?

I need to know what colours to paint my walls  
I want them to look just as isolating as yours  
see, I'm building a fortress around me  
but my walls are made of mud and honey

## **they made a toy out of me**

they made a toy out of me  
put me up on a shelf like a novelty  
and all those actions still stalk me like a massive  
blood thirsty captive  
set free  
like a spring in the back  
from a broken mattress  
surreptitious and malicious  
so I ran out of things to say  
my potential was too high for me to reach  
maybe it was because I tried too hard to find meaning  
to look for stars on the ceiling  
it used to be such a beautiful pain  
living in my brain  
I downed too much coffee  
feeling like a cup in the cabinet  
only meant to look at.  
they made a toy out of me  
put me up on a shelf like a novelty  
and I haven't stopped falling down since



# Patrick N'kanu Okoi



*Patrick N'kanu Okoi is a student at Ebonyi State University in Nigeria where he is doing a masters degree in public health. He is 23 years old and he was born in Ugep, Nigeria. Patrick is passionate about poetry and has been writing creatively for six years. His goal for his writing is to teach, inspire and change people across the world through his creative works.*



## Burnt Dreams

When in time  
We gather to dine  
As brothers familiar  
With anguish  
Come with your scars  
If you can, wear them  
This is how we remind ourselves  
Of the pain in each word  
Uttered in silence – too numerous to count  
Because of all the burnt dreams  
And charred hopes  
Ours is blackest  
But boys like us were born  
To play with flames.

## A Portion of Earth

Pay close attention  
To the melodies of your beauty  
And listen carefully  
To the rhythms of your scars.  
For there are days  
When eyes will disagree with  
The truths of your beauty  
And lips excavate  
The regrets beneath those scars  
But remember then that you are  
A portion of Earth dipped in stars  
And a chord of music  
In an orchestra of a million guitars.

## Silence

After ages of letting  
Your voice slumber in cold sheets  
Of solemn gloom put to rest by  
The chorus of a thousand hushes.  
Awake! I want to fill my lungs with  
The air that leaves your mouth  
For you did not forget how to speak  
Silence is golden and your tongue  
Weighs a thousand ounces

## Bodily Music

Our faces were a canvas  
A sheet on which a painter  
Sketches, colours and covers  
The stain on our laughter  
Yet,  
Our bodies become music, a psalm  
For we stamped our feet;  
Gbam! Gbam!  
And danced, unrestrained  
To the melodies of our heartbeats.

## This Home

Here lies a ruptured soul  
A flinty being.  
A heart with a hole;  
A pit for love burying.  
On this epitaph, truth hopes to survive  
Where lies live in abundance  
And trust is strong and alive  
In a casket of buried conscience.  
Here, loneliness is a lovely sensation  
That satisfies hunger in quiet  
For solitude is a nutrition  
And poetry a balanced diet.  
A lone spirit  
In a body that echoes laughter  
Where every door in is an exit  
And doors are shut thereafter.



# N.E. Adams



*Natalee Elaine Adams is a 33-year-old aspiring writer whose first love is poetry. She was born in Port Elizabeth but grew up in Cape Town. She studied journalism, and she has an interest in history and philosophy, and she is passionate about psychology. Adams is profoundly influenced by nature, the human condition and nineteenth-century literature. She has been writing since the age of 13 and finds catharsis in the process.*





## **Mother**

You seem as lost as I am  
I saw it  
Buried in your eyes  
I wanted to reach out and take hold of your hand  
The one not holding your child  
I wanted to tell you I deserve no more than you

I wanted you to see my soul  
Not my skin colour  
I wanted you to know I am sorry  
Sorry that this life has failed you  
That it has failed me too

But we are not equal  
You know this  
I am a meal ticket  
Nothing more  
And for this I am sorry

We endure this emptiness  
And for what  
An idea of hope...  
The strongest illusion of all

## **The Still**

I have known peace  
And beauty  
And eternity  
And love  
However fleeting  
Not built by man  
But forged in solitude  
From a moment  
Whispers carried by the wind  
All the secrets of the universe  
In the rivers, the trees, the fields  
I have felt it all  
I have drowned in every memory

# N.E. Adams

## Belonging

Sometimes it is too much  
The nothingness of it all  
An emptiness that stretches out as far as the eye can see  
Searching for meaning  
For beauty  
In the smallest of measurements

For a moment that is nothing more nor nothing less  
Simply enough  
Perfection in its truest form  
She craved it all  
Undiluted and unrefined  
Meaning amongst the chaos  
To understand the light inside her darkness  
To feel everything  
And nothing

She belonged nowhere and to no one  
And yet longed for an anchor  
For even she could not tame the seas that called out to her  
Pulling her into the deep

She knows now  
That one day the tide will come for her  
Perhaps to take her home  
To a place she longs for  
That only her soul  
can know

## Healing

To sit with your pain  
To know it  
Let it rush in and face it  
To know where it hides  
In the dusty corners of your mind  
The shattered pieces of your heart  
The ones that don't seem to fit together  
To see it in the lines that trace your skin  
Where battle lines were drawn

Our pain is a poison we drink often  
For which time is the only remedy

## Moments

I've been spread over too many lifetimes  
Too many personas  
Too many masks  
I am not of my own  
But merely a reflection

I was whole once  
For a time  
It was you and I  
A walk at dusk  
Just us and the woods  
And the illusion of eternity

And then we let go  
That moment was my home



# Gideon Idudje



*Born in the mid-west in Ughelli, Nigeria, Gideon Idudje is a bookworm with a passion for literary works. He is a graduate of Delta State University and is presently a clergyman. He uses the poetic form to create dramatic descriptions of gripping circumstances as a means to reveal human struggles and the imagination.*

*Editor's note: The remarkable poem to follow by Idudje is one of the most complex pieces we have featured thus far in JAY Lit. The multiplicity of Eyes That Look Are Many, Eyes That See Are Few is worthy of close reading and study. The poem is inspired by Idudje's personal encounter with an inmate at Abolongo Prison in the city of Ibadan, while on a missionary tour.*



# Gideon Idudje

## Eyes That Look Are Many, Eyes That See Are Few

"You saw my yesterday, seated in your lap today,  
Dirty-duty rusty and arrogance humming,  
Bathing in the smokes of marijuana, basking it malodor,  
Yet, you didn't bother to wash me your words of corrections.

Did you? Such rhetoric. My pale eyes pierced through the crowd,  
In a satirical stare – numbed I am, but none feel my quake, my fears.  
Inner river streaming out, and also my eyes are maps from the  
Streams, but none can see this deadly waterfall,  
As the verdict is set to fit its fangs on me, and I will jerk a little.  
Maybe for a few seconds or so.

The cane of lashes you would have used to caress my arrogance,  
And my ignorance purged, paste me with the soap of discipline,  
Rinse me in the waters of reprimanding, dry me with the towels  
Of follow-up, and smoothing the cap of my attitudes cos' You know,  
I don't know. But instead you coddled me in extravagance, sheltered  
Me in the coat of pampering, baked me in the oven of negligence,  
And now am made into the shape of; had I known!"

The position of the heart is turned, the pale horizon beckoning at him.  
In saddened happiness he rolls his eyes. The bat is caught while flying  
In the daylight; what next? Judgment soon is knocking on the door.

No brother to keep him, no mother to hood him, no father to stand him.  
In the eyes of a prisoner, lies the corridor of lost hopes, disdain has  
Eaten up his being "Eyes that look are many, eyes that see are but few."  
Death is approaching when hope is far, love is kept in chains when  
Hatred is let loose. Men's hearts are heavy, the law must speak – the verdict  
is screaming...

"Tell marriage! the course of a union and mate is that which tells stakes of  
A man's estates. Tell the street boy! the color of palm wine, doesn't  
Say its taste. Tell the music, the sound of the gong is not determined  
By the player but the payer. Tell fashion! the queen bee's drain tells a drone's  
Fate. Tell the Big man, a faithful laborer is worthy of his rewards. Tell  
Steve the steward only the honest tortoise eats the healthiest palm fruit.

Please also tell the mechanism of politics, the biggest house is not the safest  
Tell the rider, the biggest horse is not always the strongest. Tell the brakes  
And accelerators, gentility never breaks a water pot, but in every rush of the  
Day, there lies a mistake!  
Please plant cautions, deep down root minds of the morrow's Oaks – child"

In the eyes of the prisoner – an arena, not for games, in the eyes of the prisoner –  
A theatre not for fame. In the eyes of the prisoner – a congregation, not for  
worshippers.  
In the eyes of the prisoner, it is an execution ground!

Eyes stone cold now, dripping ice of "Had I known." As he jerks finally, she stood  
by the crowd pouring for her boy, did never see his eyes brown again.



# Nkhensani Maluleke



*Nkhensani Maluleke considers herself a great lover of art, literature and research. She has published other content such as articles and poetry. She started her authorship and creative journey at a tender age, competing in speech and poetry in written and oral forms. Nkhensani is from Gauteng, South Africa.*



# Nkhensani Maluleke

## The light you carry inside

Light  
Bright  
Fast

Within  
Inside

You carry what you're searching outside  
Look within

The solution is you  
The solution is with you

Doubt  
Fear  
Of results

Lies travel fast  
But not faster than light

Choose light

1

## The voice knocked on my window sill

Shhh!!  
Silence spoke  
I glanced around no one was to be found  
Oh, I see  
Myself alone, in the midst of the lost souls  
They are unseen  
But they are on scene  
Do what is right  
What is easy won't last

I took a step forward  
Who are you?  
That's a question in my head  
Your heart is pure  
Let it control the path that will,  
Make your dreams come true

Darkness  
Terror  
Hope increased  
Still I stood  
Next to a window sill

2





## Ntombhi ya mu Tsonga

Inaka, hi sweswo!

Intombhi ya mu Tsonga yoleyo

Wayi vona musi

Matihlo onge iswipfalo swa namuneti

Yo vayi vayi

Ndziri swisuti leswi swo khindli khindli loko yifamba

I mbhurhi yoleyo, vumudzuku bya yona byo vanga vanga

Majaha andza ha vuli, milomo yisala yilo gabaa na “a” yinene ayi humi

Laha yikandziyaka ko ku sala kuku dzindi dzingi

Dziri vona yela yako, cenka wako, tikhwini tako

Ivi yiku saka saka, xibelani xiku ni voneni

Adzaha vuli loko yiku ridzi ridzi, guxe rituvuka na swimusani

Ndziri vuswa byako ku phamiwa swimarha tsena

Na bundu rinene ari copeti

Nhlonipho, vumbhurhi, vutlhari ni vuswikoti swo khapakhapa

I ntombi ya mu Tsonga yoleyo

*'Ntombhi ya mu Tsonga' ['Tsonga Girl'] is a narrated poem in Xitsonga celebrating the subject for who she is as well as her abilities and beauty, among other attributes. We hear of how beautiful her eyes are, and how men look at her with admiration. We are given a mental picture of the Xitsonga traditional attire she is wearing including a nceka, xibelani, yela and tikhwini. How she handles herself with dignity and boldness when she walks is described as well as her ability to enact Xitsonga traditional dance. Finally, we hear about how she is respectful, has an eye for detail, and her intelligence indicates she will have a bright future.*

*Xitsonga is a Southern African language spoken by more than 15 million people mostly living in Eswatini, Mozambique, South Africa, and Zimbabwe.*



# Richard Chilango Jr



*Richard Chilango Jr is a journalist, poet, writer and gender activist from Malawi who is conscious of the whispers in the society each time his pen bleeds. He writes on diverse emerging issues; however, his main area of speciality is feminine-oriented poetry. He writes to create positive gender rhetoric on the global scene and, in the process, bringing an end to the culture of silence which most women and girls are subject to in the face of gender-based violence and discrimination. Currently, Chilango is pursuing a BA in communication and cultural studies majoring in public relations. Instagram: [poetic\\_jr](#).*





## Melanin Arsenal

Dear black Sister,  
you are the epitome of  
beauty; heart of bayonet, spirit and bravery  
hands stretched like canons, lips dropping wisdom  
and eyes dreaming dreams  
scribbled in the air; full of  
sounds of ammunition for success  
But in a community tainted with  
tribal marks, your bravery is camouflaged,  
and your future is blocked by racial boundaries

May your dark skin  
reek sufficient melanin  
and spank brutality  
of politics on skin color.

## Spinster

Her mind throwing a stare at a soul mate  
She tosses caution to the wind  
Like a die  
having missed the desired end.  
Yesterday, her heart got stung  
But she still awaits true love  
Like the Second Coming  
And listens to the loud song of time lag

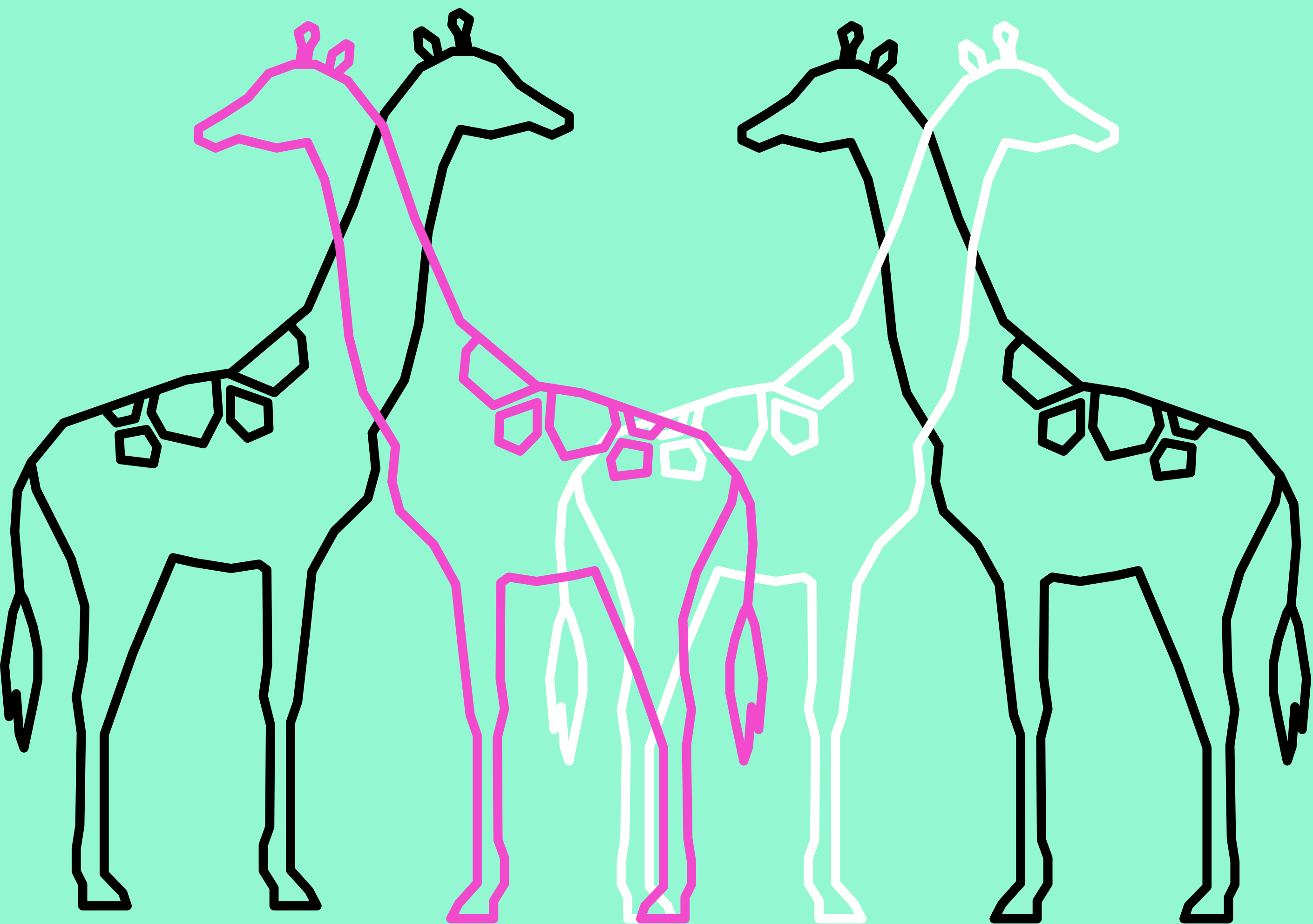
She breathes green light to her admirer.  
And when her aficionada reciprocates interest  
Her expectation floodgates jolt  
Like a dimple on a happy cheek.  
That anticipation of “Maybe tomorrow” shall linger  
And in the long run  
She touches her romantic Canaan  
A witness of life becomes!

## Soul Mate

One day I will paint a letter  
On the canvas of your heart  
About us swimming in immortal waters  
Together, swaying like seaweeds  
Yet  
More often than not  
For if I ever lose you  
it is nostalgia that will poke my eyes  
to brand a channel of tears.

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# SHORT STORIES





# Phindile Gumede



*Phindile Gumede, aka Phindi, is a masters graduate from the University of Johannesburg. She currently works as a lecturer in history at Unisa. She describes herself as “a teacher at heart”. Phindi enjoys watching crime investigation shows, reading and writing in her spare time. Since she is a history fanatic too, her stories are fictitious, but with a historical feel.*

*She says, “The story in history depends on who tells it. Africans need to tell their history as much as they tell their stories. Lina’s story is dedicated to my mother. She raised both myself and her sisters the best way she could. While she lives, I want to tell her story too in her honour. The past is a legacy that cannot be undone, neither forgotten.”*



# Phindile Gumede

## The Present Past: Lina's Story

A cold winter day, I wake up to the smell of smoke from the coal stove left burning during the night. "What is for breakfast?" I thought, "Humph, as if I have a choice."

"*Pilisi*,"<sup>1</sup> that is what we called her. Our stepmother is one of the most sadistic people I have ever met. I don't remember why we call her that, but I think it is because every time she would come home from work, for somewhat reason – my stomach would turn. I always think of my mother every time, what she looked like, smelled like, and how she sounded. I was three when she passed away. My father, the leader of the apostolic church, rarely speaks about her. It is as if she is deliberately removed from our memory. But I don't want to assume.

I get up to get ready for school, but before I could fold my sponge and blankets, I noticed there on the floor of the kitchen door a tin of *vaskerese*.<sup>2</sup> My stepmother has put it there for me to clean the floors, the *stoep*,<sup>3</sup> and the window seals with. Mariah, my sister, is already sweeping *lebala*,<sup>4</sup> and it is my turn today to clean the floors and put the *vaskerese* on.

"*Le tlogeleng lebesa laka le nama – ake rutisi basadi*,"<sup>5</sup> objected my stepmother as if one of us had said anything to her. I have often wondered what she meant by those words. I know that she has said that more times than I could count.

"Mosadi?"<sup>6</sup> The fourteen-year-old me I wondered why my stepmother called us that and, although I have always wondered, I have never got an answer.

We shared the crust from yesterday's pap and black tea for breakfast, and then we left for the long journey to school. The long walk to freedom, I thought. I ought to be very careful with my steps as I begin to watch out for broken glass or stones that may hurt my feet. Barefoot and all, Leslie and I began treading the uphill journey to school. Mariah was the oldest amongst us, and she had already left school before finishing her junior certificate. Pilisi had made her leave school and in two years, I am likely to be next. I have often felt it, a deep sense of longing for something, or someone – I am not sure.

Mariah was working at the factory uptown from our home in Killarney, Soweto. Pilisi found her a job there to work. She often came home every day with the new stories she heard from other factory workers. One day, as both she and I were preparing our sponges to go to sleep in the kitchen, Mariah told Leslie and I a story of a woman who said that her husband had made their daughter pregnant and now she is raising her as a stepchild.

"I know of a one-legged prostitute who took off her wooden leg and hit her male clients with it for refusing to pay up," interjected Ntate Rorisang.

We burst out laughing. There was something about our conversations which made everything seem alright. For just that moment, life was okay. I always think of such funny stories, especially when I am alone. I always try to picture the people in them, how they felt and if they could laugh at their stories the same way we do.

We arrive at the corner of Kwa-Khethi. She sells *magwinya*<sup>7</sup> for twenty cents – the best in Soweto I think. Leslie walks in the shop and buys two *magwinyas*. Ntate had given him thirty-five cents as carry money. I watched him combine two *magwinyas* with some cold meat and gobble them down. My mouth began to salivate as my eyes turned to bitter hate. I had a crust for breakfast and Ntate gives Leslie money to buy *magwinya*. I could not understand why he spoilt him. At no particular moment did Leslie think to share with me and it was these unfair privileges he had which made me loathe and envy him at the same time.





“*Are tsamaye*,”<sup>8</sup> said Leslie, after wiping his oily mouth using the back of his hand.

Today is going to be a good day, I thought to myself. As we began to walk, I thought of her again, my mother. The only thing that my father told me about her was that I was named after her. The English name belonged to her, whilst my Sotho name was my distant aunt’s. I think I would have been closer to her than any of my siblings because of our name. Our name was the only connection I was left with, and I knew that I would treasure that forever. After descending down the hill, there down the dusty streets was our school.

“*Bakwala gate!*”<sup>9</sup> exclaimed Leslie as he started run as fast as he could, leaving me behind. Of course he could, after all the precious son had the shoes to protect him against the harsh stones and cold underneath our feet. I don’t mean to despise him, but he’s just too spoilt. He is more likely to finish high school, as my stepmother does not let us forget.

I also began to run because I don’t want Meneer Khumalo to reprimand me and accuse me of strolling after hearing the school bell.

“Lina!” shouted Meneer. “You two are always late. Are you not tired of the lashes from the principal?”

“We are sir,” I responded. “It is the house chores we need to finish before heading to school every day. We will try to be early from tomorrow, sir.”

“Alright, you are lucky because the principal is not in today – run to the assembly quickly.”

The long lines, both hands on the shoulders of the pupil in front guaranteed that our lines were straight and that there was no commotion. Zindzi, the best choir leader at our school, started our morning song with a beaming smile on her face. Her confidence and beauty could not stop me from always staring at her whenever she sang. She was sure to capture the attention of the teachers and all the learners. She wasn’t scared. She sang. There was something about this song today, although I had heard it for the hundredth time. I felt the warm flowing of my tear on my right cheek. The song resonated and stirred up a deep feeling of discomfort and longing. I quickly wiped my cheek in case someone sees me. I never understand why I always get emotional every time on the fifteenth of every month. Mariah says that it is PMS or something.

“Every time a lady goes to the ‘market’ her body and her emotions are sensitive” – I remembered that from our bedtime conversations. Mistress Magwaza leads the Lord’s prayer every morning. The words are said in SeSotho and, immediately after that, line-by-line we begin to go to class.

I really like school, but knowing that I may not even finish high school is a painful part of my story. I will probably work in the same factory as Mariah and every morning after our chores – we will both tread along to catch the 7:30 train at Phefeni. I hardly even dream about what I will be one day. I know that Ntate will not even object to us working after before junior certificate. It is expected that I will get married soon, then in doing so – no money would be wasted on taking me to school.



## Phindile Gumede

The afternoon rain came unexpectedly. Leslie and I wait until it stops because we couldn't start walking home through the rain. The ticking clock in the classroom was as loud as the dripping sound of water through the ceiling. Our tin roof class was no match against the howling wind which sounded like an angry confrontation between the wind and the trees. I start to peer through the window to see if the rain was stopping.

*"Ke ya Medupi,"* said Leslie, *"Pula ya Medupi."*<sup>10</sup>

I remembered when Ntate used that term when describing such a rainfall. He always said that this kind of rain is often associated with the kind people anticipate before harvest season. This rain was sure not to kill any vegetation, but water could seep through the soil instead of washing it away, causing a flood. These conversations with Ntate are the ones which remind me how intelligent he was. He always spoke in English whenever he schooled Leslie, Mariah and I. His accent all of a sudden changed, each syllable was carefully pronounced as he articulated every fact to us.

"It's stopping!" exclaimed Leslie.

Frightened by the screeching of the table as he stood up, we start to pick up our school bags and head for the door. We then begin to walk towards the gate, and we say goodbye to Ntate Mojalefa, the caretaker. We were the last to leave the school and we started to walk.

The dark night is approaching, and Leslie and I start to walk faster. As we come near the street, we see a dark cloud of smoke from our chimney. Pilisi is home; I turn to Leslie. He stares at me and doesn't say a word. We enter, and as we do, the scary silence shouted at us as we open the door. The cold stare from our stepmother was sharp and piercing. She silently closed the pap pot on the stove and moved towards us.

Leslie murmured that the rain had closed us in and we were waiting for it to stop before walking back home. She glanced at me, and back at Leslie, and walked away. I was shocked. Her silence felt worse than her beatings. I knew that it was not over. Somehow I prefer to get beaten because that meant that the punishment was over as soon as the beating was over. I knew that she was always angry. I am not sure why that was the case.

"She never had children of her own," explained Mariah during our conversations in the kitchen whilst washing the dishes. "I don't want to be like her. I want to have a husband and children one day."

"*Aus*"<sup>11</sup> Mariah, do you ever think about your dreams? Do you ever think if you are still going to be able to see them through?"

"I don't have dreams," said Mariah. Her response was said to me plainly so, with no feeling and seemingly with no care. "Can't you see?" she continued, "People like us can't dream. This is the real world and, like Ntate said, when you are grown, you become more aware of certain things."

"But Ntate would often say, '*Hola ngwanaka, o tla di bona,*'"<sup>12</sup> I responded to Mariah.

"Exactly."

"But I don't think that Ntate meant that we couldn't dream."

"The problem is that you are still too young to understand Lina." Her words and tone sounded like that I was the final thing she was to say to me.





Dawn came with a loud bang on the door.

*“Polisie! Maak oop de deur!”<sup>13</sup>*

Mariah opened the door as instructed and in entered a large, Afrikaner policeman. He demanded to speak to my father. The two walked out of the house and, after a short while, my father returned and did not say anything to us. He walked out again with his passbook in his hand. He was obviously upset. After a short while, my father came in from the brief meeting with the officer.

“See what I mean?” said Mariah, and she walked away from me to the bedroom to get ready for work. I kept thinking about what Mariah said. I wanted to go to nursing college one day. I wanted to go on an airplane. I want a big house, a picket fence and a yard. I want to get married one day. I want.

“Lina!” Leslie shouted. “Are you done with sweeping the yard? We need to go before we arrive late at school.” I was perplexed. I knew that there was something more to life than working in a factory. I wanted a life that was different from my stepmother’s.

I thought of her again. My mother. I wonder if she had dreams. I wonder what she would have said about this. But the more I wondered, the more I realised that I really did not know her. Everything I thought about her is something I had thought to myself. I wonder what she looked like. There was no picture of her anywhere in the house. Maybe Mariah is right.

Perhaps things are actually worse that they seem. I nodded, grabbed the last bead crust from the plate and headed out the door with my book tucked under my arm and walked out with Leslie.



Mistress Mabuza, the English teacher, always spoke with eloquence. She always told us stories of her days at Fort Hare University. “The only Black university in South Africa,” she would always say with pride. Her esteem of the “George” language made it easier for me to enjoy school. Perhaps I should be a teacher. If I am to be a teacher, I could finish school, go to Fort Hare, and go on an airplane.

“Lina...” an echo-like voice called for me. “What is the answer to question two?”

I panicked. I had slipped again into my thoughts without realising. “Ma’am?” I replied to Mistress Mabuza. A couple of giggles were heard in the classroom. A disappointed stare from my favourite teacher was more embarrassing than the laughs of my classmates. Realising my fault, I fixed my posture and sat up straight, so as not to miss any more of the lesson. A few minutes later, Mistress Mabuza was interrupted by the clanging sound of the bell.

“Lethobane, remain in class.” Her beckoning eyes and the sound of her summons was scary. She usually called me Lee, but somehow her formality assured me that she was concerned.

When the class finally cleared out, she came closer to my seat and sat on my table. Her perfume smelled like a summer’s day rose. She was beautiful, more than that she was intelligent. I had never met a black woman like her.

“Is everything alright?”

## Phindile Gumede

“Ma’am?” I replied as if I did not hear what she asked.

“Are you okay? You seemed very distracted. I know that the riots in Orlando are scary. We are living in very tense times. Lina, you are one of my best students, and I know that you are capable of achieving great things in the future.”

“Ma’am, my brother and I use the back route behind the train station to get to school and to go back home, so we are not really affected by any rioting. It’s just that...” I choked.

“Yes, it’s okay, you can talk to me. Sandwich?” She pulled out her *skaftin*<sup>14</sup> right from her satchel under her arm.

“Yes please.” It was a peanut butter and jam sandwich, and I gobbled it down, and before I knew it, Mistress’ smile changed to a blank stare.

“When was the last time you ate Lina?”

I was embarrassed. “I ate before coming to school, Mistress.”

“Oh, Okay. Well, I am glad you enjoyed it. So, you were about to tell me something?”

“Yes, mistress. There was a policeman who came looking for my father this morning and that scared me. I left this morning and my father was still upset.”

“He is embarrassed. You see Lina, South Africa is at war. There is so much hate in the air,” she replied as she glanced up at the tin roof. My eyes could not help but follow her glance. She laughed. “Of course, I don’t mean that literally. I mean that in a figurative sense but... actually in a very real sense. A while ago, we had to leave the township to really see the hate against *Abantu*.<sup>15</sup> But now, the hate knocks on our doors. One day and I hope soon, hate will go away. Love is always stronger than hate. Hate eats away your mind, but love ignites the heart.”

“Ma’am?” I said to her, sounding even more confused. She laughed. Her dimpled and pearly white smile came out.

“Apartheid, segregation, discrimination and poverty are all hate. They all oppress people, while benefiting others.”

“So Ma’am, do you think that one day this will all be over?”

“We sure hope so,” she interjected. “What do you want to be when you grow up?”

“I don’t know yet. I want to go on airplane.”

She laughed again. “That is what you want to do, not what you want to be.”

“I think I want to be a teacher Ma’am, and a nurse.”

She chuckled again. “Well, then Ma’am, Sister Lina Lethobane, you can be anything. Do not be afraid to defy anything or anyone who tries to stop you or talk you out of your dreams.”

Her sincerity as she said those words to me was very heavy. She didn’t blink as she said that. She smiled and patted me on the back. The bell rang. The learners came in trickles and she moved away slowly to her table with a grin on her face.







Lebohang Gumede

Phindile Gumede's mother in 1978  
Lebohang was 23 years old and a newly married  
mother while in Grade 10  
The photo was taken at Thutolore Secondary School  
in Soweto, Johannesburg

# Phindile Gumede

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Afterschool came. This time, the sky was blue. It was very warm outside. “Love is always stronger than hate,” I kept repeating those words.

“What!?” questioned Leslie, who was walking behind me as I was heading for the gate.

“Nothing,” I replied to him. “Leslie, when I grow up, I want to be like Mistress Mabuza.”

“Hmph!” he scoffed. “Let’s hurry up, I want to go to the grounds with my friends later on.”

Afterschool had come and for the first time, when it came, I was happy. I wanted to tell Mistress Mabuza about my mother, and I knew that one day I would.

## Notes

- 1 From IsiZulu, informal: pill
- 2 Afrikaans: kerosene
- 3 Stoop
- 4 SeSotho: The yard
- 5 "Do not dare touch my milk and meat – I don’t take women to school."
- 6 "Woman?"
- 7 Fried dough, also called vetkoek in Afrikaans in South Africa
- 8 SeSotho: "Let’s go."
- 9 "They are closing the gate!"
- 10 "It’s light rainfall... The light rainfall."
- 11 Sister
- 12 "Grow up my child, so that you can see the world for what it truly is."
- 13 Afrikaans: "Police! Open the door!"
- 14 From Afrikaans: lunchbox
- 15 IsiZulu: Black people



# Clara Jack



*More than most things, 20-year-old Clara Jack identifies as a writer. She also runs a wine gift shop, TVE by Clara, and she is a law student. Being from Nigeria doesn't exactly make things easy, so as a response to stimulus she won't be caught dead not trying. Clara aspires to be a teacher and she is an avid reader.*

# Clara Jack

## Millennium Children

*Karina*

Crap. I'm turning twenty in four months. God, the questions are going to start rolling in. Karina when are you bringing a man home? Karina what are the colours for the wedding? Karina how many children do you want to have? Karina what comes next after school? The answers to all these questions? Ha, well, Karina 2.0 wants to breathe. Just in and out. Maybe once, maybe twice, but I want to breathe.

*Dede*

My father wants me to cut my afro. Apparently it stopped being cute this year and a man of twenty years of age shouldn't have an afro on his head. I'm not even twenty yet. April is like lightyears away. Okay, it's in four months, but still. I like my hair and I want to keep it. It's good for this photography thing. I'll have to fight my father for this one.

*Joke*

I think I want to be something more than pretty. Okay, I know I want to be something more than pretty. I want to fly planes, not sit at home and birth children. Twenty is on the horizon and if I sit here, they'll marry me to one of these boys. I want to fly planes and see the world for what it is. I need to leave this place before April.

*Zika*

Football is my absolute best thing in the world. You know. The sand, the dust, the sweat, the screams, the men. That is the name of the game. My love for it. But mummy doesn't agree with me. Instead, I should bring snacks for the boys and daddy and not watch my favourite team win the champions league. Hell, man, April can't come sooner. Zika 2.0 will watch all the matches that she wants.



That was the thing about Millennium children. The Universe was able to monitor everything they did. They couldn't be lost in the numbers or the leap years.

Zika was enthralled by it. She was enchanted by the tiniest things. That was her superpower. The ability to fall in love with anything and anybody. Joke had once called it her enigma, even though at the time she did not know the meaning of the word. Karina did not mind the Millennium reminder. She liked it sometimes. She never had to search her brain for how old she was meant to be. Joke despised it. She wanted to be able to mask everything about herself and the last digit of the year, which always mocked her because it was the same as her own number of years. Dede forgot he was a Millennium child most of the time.



Dede was the photographer who had an afro and a good soul. He had loved one girl all his university life. Only she did not feel the same way and well he had never actually told Joke. He was not the rebellious one or the one who his parents had heartache over. In all honesty, his father sometimes bullied him after Yimika, his younger sister, had died during his first year in university.

Everyone blamed him for her death. On bad days, he blamed himself too. She was in secondary school and lied about coming to see him at the university when she was really going to see someone else. It was something that Dede strongly disapproved of for reasons like power and age dynamics, but when he told Yimika these things, she laughed at him and paid no attention. When she died, he wished she had survived and kept laughing at him again and again for looking out for her.





It was one of those cases that when it surfaced on the Internet there were a thousand different versions, but none of them actually true. The only person who knew the real story was dead. Yimika had died and part of Dede had died with her. A tiny bit of Zika too.

Zika once saw Wayne Rooney score a goal from the middle of the pitch at Old Trafford and that was it. The thrill of it all was on the pitch on her screen. Nothing else captivated her like that. The only thing that came close was art. Art like Donatello and Picasso and in her eighteenth year, Nok art rang a bell in her head. Those were the two loves of her life. The boys came, but she didn't like any of them. She dated two out of pity, and when sex became a deal-breaker, she left. She had contemplated the idea that she might have been gay or bi; it was something she secretly studied. There were so many spectrums to choose from that it excited her.

Half of her fire, however, dimmed when her cousin died. Yimika was the only other sun in the family and when she stopped burning, sometimes Zika felt less like a sun and more like a house on fire. Except when she met Karina. Fire lighting, far dreaming, men-loving Karina. They could burn houses together.

Karina was beautiful. In every sense of the word. Her love for everything lovable and her gift of never actually giving up no matter how hard it was. She never even let people know if she was hurting. Her parents had fallen in love severely and that was a tick in her box for things that had gone right in her life. Not even the fact that her parents were practising atheists could sway her happiness. When people asked her what religion she was, she simply smiled and said "Whichever one saves me in the end". It was poetic and quite true.

Survival was pivotal to Karina. She never cascaded anything. She always told her friends, "Most of what I do is because I want to be here tomorrow and the day after that". Karina liked to live that way. She believed in "extreme" living and survival was key to living. The harder you survived, the wider your plane of living and being able to characterise your events, "The grand event of being alive".

Joke was... There is no word in English strong enough to describe Joke. The fierce look in her eyes when something irritated her. Her longing to do things no one had done before. Her wanting to do things just because people said she couldn't do it. She wore feminism with her wig. Cutting her hair off just because she felt like it – that was Joke. She felt fear and she never hid it. She believed that being afraid meant you were trying something out of your reach.

She was also very deep into things she felt people her age couldn't relate to. After starting what she terms the best series on the planet, The Good Place was all she could rant about.

She spent a lot of time reading philosophical books mentioned in the series and talked about it to her friends. She dreamed of owning her own library full of these books when she finally moved out. It was something that kept her moving.



The crippling fear and longing to turn twenty for various reasons started rising on the first day of the new year. It had slept in their bellies on the previous day. Now it had wings. The fear even grew heavier when news of the pandemic had surfaced in China. They worried about turning twenty in what was arguably one of the worst years in modern times.

## Clara Jack

For Dede, it began when his father had sat him down, telling him of the reasons why his hair would not get him a good job to make enough money. Dede listened with rapt attention but looked at his father with concealed disgust. His father had never once asked him what he wanted to do because as far as he was concerned, Dede was born to be an engineer. It was ironic because Dede narrowly escaped failing. He wasn't at the top of the class, but he was close to the bottom. He was at the lower middle for so long, sometimes it felt like the top.

The lower middle was a term his sister had coined. She insisted that they deserved recognition too. They convinced themselves that the lower middle was a good place to be. Never to be caught not trying, and never to be caught trying too hard.

Dede dreaded turning twenty. Twenty meant no more hiding in school where the shutter of his camera could give him ecstatic deafness. Twenty meant convocation, youth service, and plunging into a job he didn't like with a spiral that only went down. Twenty meant SEND HELP.

Zika could not wait to turn twenty. She felt that when she turned twenty she could finally leave her parents' house where no one ever listened to her when she wanted to do the things she liked. In Zika's house, she was meant to do everything for her parents and four brothers but nothing for herself. The minute she sat down to painstakingly rewatch a match she already knew the scores to, her mother's voice would erupt from her room ever so loud, telling her to get up and stop watching football. It was not for her. She should learn how to cook, how to clean, how to take care of a man, and not how to be a man. Twenty meant Zika could leave all this behind. It meant maybe running away, maybe disappearing but for sure, it meant the freedom to be herself.

Karina despised turning twenty. Ever since she was nineteen, her parents and relatives had not stopped asking her when she was going to introduce them to their in-laws. Her parents' early love had negated any other train of thought that didn't end with her finding love at the same age they did. They insisted that even now it was easier. What irritated her the most was the feigning of concern, the pretending like it was more about her than it was about them. It sickened her. Where she was at was an isolation room because when she left for school, they could not see her to annoy her but after convocation, they would chew her raw.

Now Karina liked men. They were okay for her except for the fact that she was meant to cling to one for the rest of her life. The one who might not be the best for her. The one who her parents might not let her leave if things went south; that fact came with a paralyzing fear.

Twenty meant paralysis. On some mornings, Karina couldn't feel her toes.

Joke longed to turn twenty. Then she could leave the country for her masters. She didn't plan to return because she felt there was nothing to return to. Her old father would not last long and her mother was already long gone. Maybe she would miss the girls but her longing to fly planes and climb mountains was stronger than that affection. When she left, she would be able to explore her sexualities. She wanted to have the freedom to try on different personality outfits to find the one that suited her best. It was basically the only reason she did anything. Twenty for Joke meant happiness untamed and ambition unbridled.



It was raining the first day the girls saw each other in the new year. It was odd because rain never fell in January but then again there they were. Joke was arguing with the security man at the gate for something neither of them could remember, but they were too deep in so they continued. Karina had been observing them a while, smiling and knowing that Joke wasn't going to stop unless someone or something intervened.





“You know, I wonder why we’re friends with Joke. She can kill us in our sleep,” Zika said from behind an unsuspecting Karina. Recognition took its course and of course, screams of delight and affection.

“Boo, your skin is glowing, Zee.”

“Thank you, thank you. I told you goat milk was the secret,” Zika replied batting her eyelashes repeatedly.

“I know, but I mean 7000 naira for only cream. Cream I can’t even rub on my face, abeg abeg,” Karina laughed. She continued, “Oya lets go and get our girl so we can do another thing.”

When they got to the ruckus, Joke was rounding up.

“Mister man. Please next time you see me avoid me. You hear? I will leave this school for you people this year, so I know we can manage till then.”

The man, who looked like his head had seen better days, shook it and headed back to his post.

“Joke, we both know you can’t remember why you were fighting with that old man,” Zika said while extending her hand to get Joke’s box out of the rain.

“Ehn, I can’t remember, but that’s one less trouble for the two of us. Abeg, how are we going to get the room with this rain? I missed you people small sha. You Zika with your nonsense football boys and you Karina with your plenty men.”

“Mhm Joke we missed you too. Zee, call the cab man. This sweater is cashmere.”

“Story,” Zika replied, getting her phone out to call the cab man except she couldn’t remember how she saved his number. They were there another hour talking about everything from the man who built the palace for his dead wife in India to the courses they were offering that semester. Dede came by in the last thirty minutes.

“You guys, I think it’s weird how all four of us are turning twenty in the same month. I honestly can’t wait.”

After Zika’s voice, all the jaw-aching smiles, and a few hmms, the rain took centre stage.



The next important milestone on the road to twenty was one night in February. Dede’s roommate, who Karina felt she could cling to for the rest of their lives, was having his twenty-first birthday party. It wasn’t exactly what a person would call a party, but it was what it was.

Karina was necking with Tunde in one corner and Joke was realizing that she didn’t look at Dede in the same repulsive way. Zika was watching a football match. The Millennium children were in balance for once. Ding! Ding! Zee’s phone chimed. She lost it.

“Guys come here. Come here. He replied me. He fucking replied me!”

Karina was the first to respond.

## Clara Jack

“What Zee? You’re so loud. It better be the lottery.”

“Oh, it’s better than the lottery. He replied me. My football man, as Joke calls him, replied me on Twitter.”

That got all their attention. Joke was initially smiling at Dede, but now she was opening her mouth to speak to Zika.

“Zee, congrats what did he say?”

“He said,” Zika’s eyes glued to her phone, “Thank you for naming me your best footballer. Means a lot. Will be in touch.” After that she screamed. “You guys, I think I’m in love.”

Dede laughed, “You, Zee, if I hear...”

“Oya na be there. I’ll marry this man and have cute babies and most of all, I’ll watch all the matches I want.”

“I’m really happy for you Zee,” Joke said, sounding the most genuine they had ever heard her sound.

The whole group went back to doing what they were doing and, out of nowhere, Karina started, “Hey you guys, I feel we will be okay you know after we turn twenty. I mean it’s just twenty.”

“Ehn because you finally found a man to take home to mummy and daddy,” Zee said and laughed.

“Maybe,” Karina muttered under her breath, but Tunde caught it and smiled.



The whole group was more or less waiting for Dede and Joke to say something, but they didn’t. Night faded and then it was three a.m. Zika and Joke went back to their rooms. Karina slept over and that morning for the first time in a while, she could feel her toes.

The rest of the days between February and April happened, but they were laced in school work and discovering new music and new old antiquities. The news of the pandemic dulled all the other anxieties they felt and took centre stage. Karina went on about how she couldn’t celebrate her birthday in a pandemic. The rest of them reminded her that they had to celebrate theirs in the pandemic as well, so she should at least leave a little of the tantrums for them.

Joke couldn’t be bothered. The only thing that bothered her was the uncertainty of how long the world would stop and how the after-effects would stall her plans to move out of the country. School was increasingly uncomfortable and the pinnacle of the worry came on the day the government ordered that they all had to go home within three days. Disaster struck and our Millennium children never saw what twenty had in store for them.

Dede was the first to turn twenty in the first week of April. That morning he felt better than he thought he would have. It was a good day only for him, as his father obsessed about the increasing numbers but for once, he left him alone. He spoke to Zika that day and he secretly rejoiced in the pandemic. It was something that gave him a break from his father’s pressures.





It was also on that day, as Joke had wished Dede a happy birthday, that they began talking more and his years of silence were paying off. Joke was listening to his advances, and he got an online job with a magazine he had applied to in the previous year.

Karina turned next, then Zika and Joke on the last day of the month. On all their birthdays they called each other to make sure their sanity was intact. Some were holding up better than the others, but May brought sadness when Karina told them she contacted the virus. It was a long month, but in June, she tested negative. She also said she had now chosen a religion that had in fact saved her, but she didn't tell them which one it was.

After what held the world at a standstill, our Millennium children turned out okay in their twentieth year. Not because everything went perfectly, but because there was no need to fear it.

Joke left the country almost immediately after convocation. Dede and Joke ended up together three years later when they were far apart. She had been with a girl and she found that she liked it. When it ended, Dede was still there, so she gave it a shot and it worked. She found that she didn't prefer being with any of them over the other, so she finally got her answer.

Zee met her football man. He wasn't perfect, but better because he made her heart skip a beat every time he spoke about what he did and who he was. Sometime later, she thought she was going to explode when she attended her first football match.

Karina and Tunde made it work. Even years later. All that happened but first, trouble hit home when they were twenty-one.

That's another story. One they will tell you.



# Bongiwe Tjedangwe Maphosa



*Bongiwe Tjedangwe Maphosa is the co-founder and co-owner of BUN Africa, a proudly African clothing store. She is a second-year accounting student at the University of South Africa who matriculated as the top English student at IONA Convent High School for Girls.*

*Her passion for creative writing led to her poems being published, and some of her poems can be found in the Avbob Poem Anthology of 2019. Bongiwe is currently a full-time manager at BUN Africa, living with her family in Pretoria, Gauteng.*





## The Street Kid's Ballad

The sun feels much colder today. It is almost as if the rising ball of fire dancing across the horizon of tall Jozi buildings is just a mirage. The streets this morning are just as quiet as they are at night. But I knew something was amiss when Mr Jabu no longer allowed us to watch cartoons on old TV sets in his shop window. I knew something was wrong when I felt my mother's face, colder than usual, and my pleas could no longer rouse her.

The night before had not been colder than any other night as we slept on the street. Our little family of ten people shared food and told stories as we would occasionally get lost watching the fire dance in an empty drum, hoping our past lives would die as the fire did. We prayed, and Mama took her cough medicine she got from the hospital down the road for free. We slept, like every other night, unaware that Mama would not rise with the sun again.

Rasta calls me back to reality by shaking me slightly on the shoulder, just like I had been doing to my mother. Except, unlike her, I come to. When I see Rasta's pearl necklace intertwined with muddy clothes and the oil hiding under his nails, I realise that last night has passed; my mother's spirit drifted with the foil paper we used to keep the fire going.

"She is not breathing," I croak. This voice I speak with is not mine; it is heavy with grief.

Mama had a terrible cough for the past week as well as a fever that even the medicine we had paid for made no difference to. She was sick. That is why the shock only lasted a second on Rasta's face. If the pain in my heart had allowed me to blink, I would have missed the look on his face. He sighed.

"Stay here, Sibụ," he pleads more than orders. His rags sway as he walks to the rest of our street family. The elder ladies clad in mismatched socks, warm boots and dirty aprons turn to me before I quickly look away and pretend to caress Mama's beautiful face. I jump when I hear the first wail. My stomach tenses and somersaults, bumping my heart in the process. The old lady is on the cold asphalt, pleading with God to bring my mother back. That is when a droplet lands on my mother's unmoving hand. The sky is not crying; I am.

I needed to see her beautiful face again, before they covered it like death is a crime. Her beauty reminds me that we live on the streets because of me. How can you kick something so delicate out of your precious house because she got pregnant at a young age? They do not deserve to know that my mother died because of them. My hand shakes, and for a moment I hope it is life returning to Mama's body, but when I let her hand go and it passively falls on her chest, I know she is gone.

I don't know how long I sit there and watch older vagrants go about their lives. Them, with their dirty clothes, oversized donated coats, and ripped woollen beanies. They go off to beg, even if cars have become scarce even in the CBD. I feel silly to hate them, to call them filthy, because when I look at my own tattered clothing embellished with hunger, I know that is what I am too. A baby vagrant. But I need to hate someone for taking my mother away.

Sirens screech as polished tires halt in front of Rasta. Sirens are never good, Mama said to run or they will separate us. I plant a kiss on her forehead and scamper across the street. I hide behind a corner close enough to still see Mama. They don't carry people who are still alive in the back of those cars, Mama. The little hope I was admittedly holding onto was loaded with my mother into the back of the vehicle that only travels in one direction.

## Bongiwe Tjedangwe Maphosa

I am a stone's throw away from the CBD before I realise that the sun is setting. My stomach growls in anticipation of food that it usually receives at sunset, but I am full of grief. I plant myself at the door of a shop that has long been abandoned. Even the sun takes forever to set today. Across me is a traffic light bent at the middle, the colors dance as they play hide and seek with each other and remind me of Mr Jabu's repair shop. It was street kid-friendly territory before people avoided the streets like a plague. A few weeks ago, instead of playing reruns of old cartoon shows, Mr Jabu would put the News channel to play all day. All the pretty ladies in red tops and men in suits would talk about was a new virus called Covid-19.

Watching this everyday was not better than cartoons, but at least the news was new each day. My friends and I would spend our lazy afternoons dusting off our clothes and mimicking the news team for fun. Then when we all huddled round the fire before sleeping, we would recite this news to everyone in serious voices as they would smile and pretend to be shocked when we were too.

"New discoveries are being made on a daily basis, as scientists grapple with the coronavirus."

"Yes indeed, my fellow colleague. What we know so far about the novel virus is that it acts like the flu. People infected will experience shortness of breath, high fever, persistent cough, and possibly dizziness," Milika announces.

"This just in. the first case of the coronavirus has hit South Africa. More details to follow," I close.

We should have sensed that life would change when the adults ushered us to sleep with worried looks on their faces. Mama dressed us up very warm that night and insisted that we sleep inside the blankets even though we always do.

The traffic light flickers on red, warning me to always be alert and bringing me back to reality. Rasta and the rest of the family will be worried by now. Although I know that I should return, what exactly am I returning to? What is life without my mother but an empty shell of crushed dreams?

Sirens and blue lights flash but once before feet in ripped and discoloured shoes flee in different directions. An authoritative voice announces over a high-pitched speaker that people are to stay inside their houses and that they will be arrested if caught on the streets again. What about me, what house should I stay in? The streets are my house, yet even they seem to reject me out of shame.

It takes another flash of blue light to get me to dash into the nearest alleyway. Sirens, people in uniform and I are cat and mouse. I fear them, so I run. My feet control themselves. It is only when I look up that I see a familiar pile of blankets and a TV repair shop.

There are people I have never seen before, covered in white rubber boots, masks from the hospital, gloves, and nurse's uniforms. They each usher Rasta and the rest of our tiny family into a truck similar in look to the one that took Mama away. Even the sun does not shine on them the way it used to. The truck roars powerfully and coughs into a start. Thick smog escapes from its rear attracted to the news playing on abandoned TVs in a shop.

"Sibu? What are you doing here?" asks a face I do not recognise. I stare, trying to decipher this concerned tone, but nothing comes to.

"Mr Jabu?" I question.

"Yes. You should have been here..."





“Where are they taking them?”

Long street. I only recall going to the homeless shelter during heavy storms and when we would be shooed from our usual spot. The warm soup, fuzzy blankets, and hushed conversations with Mama hold priceless memories. I have to see that place and Rasta again. Mr Jabu stops me before I take off.

“Take this mask and wear it, don’t take it off, Sibü. Always stay at least a meter away from people and when you do sneeze, cover it.” He looks to the news relating South Africa’s first death from Covid-19.

“Stay safe, son,” he nods.



By the time I stand in front of the fading shelter, the sun is battering my back and searing its presence into my feet. An older lady aims a device at my forehead and instructs me to sing “Happy birthday” while I wash my hands. Before I can inquire, she moves on to the next person hoping to find space. I dry my hands on the flimsy material of my tattered pants and set off to join the food line. I did not realise how hungry I was until the bread soaked in soup melts on my parched tongue.

Everyone looks the same with the masks on. How am I to find my family if I cannot tell a stranger from them. I feel the same emptiness I feel when I tried to beg for food and no cars were in sight. People no longer opened their windows to offer us food; they would adjust their masks and speed off. We need them more now, but they are scared to get sick.

“It’s hopeless,” I think as I walk away from the shelter.

“Sibü? Is that you?” that’s what I hear just before warmth fills me.

“Rasta? Milika? Gog’ Viola?” I know we cannot touch, but seeing them is enough for me.

“Where have you been, boy? We have great news. It’s your mother. She is alive!”

Rasta catches me before I hit the ground.

“It’s okay, Sibü. She has the virus, but the hospital says that she is healing. She is at Redcross, downtown. When they saw she was breathing they took her to the emergency ward.”

As sudden as my dizzy spell is my speed to the hospital. She is alive. Mama is alive. The thought propels me forward at an unearthly speed. I ignore the bile threatening to explode and the burning in my lungs because my mother is alive. I should never have left her. And I never will again.

I want to remove the suffocating mask, but Mama’s health depends on me. For the first time, I don’t mind the strong stench of soapy alcohol on my hands, the scratchy mask on my face, and the new clothes I am wearing. The nurse talks me through my visit before I see my mother’s face. She is getting better. I see her, but they do not let me to go close to her.

“Sibü,” Mama says through a breathless smile. From that look in her eyes, I know that we will survive this, we will heal, and everything will be just fine.

# Nathi Poswa



*Nathi is a 22-year-old from Queenstown, Eastern Cape. In 2019, she completed her honours degree in psychology at Nelson Mandela University. At present, she is an educator assistant at a local high school and beauty products distributor.*

*Nathi fell in love with writing when she was a teenager experiencing challenges and used writing as an escape. Now she writes and shares her personal life stories with the aim of making a difference in the lives of others.*





## 21st century “cure” for homosexuality

Mama had already booked me an appointment against my will and my session was set for Wednesday at 12. When Wednesday came, she skipped work and we met just outside town where we had agreed she would pick me up and we would go together. Her reason for this going together was that she did not trust me. She did not trust that I would go see the one person who would “cure” me of my homosexuality, or so she hoped. I know this because she said it.

*“Ndifuna ukusa ngokwam kwenzela ungabaleki, ndifuna ukubona ungena nyani.”<sup>1</sup>*

I was conflicted by this attitude. Why would I run away mama? Was the doctor going to beat the homosexuality out of me? Was I too sick that I resisted treatment like an addict? And, where would I run to? Do you now not know that I am an obedient child ma?

The drive to the doctor’s office was about two minutes long, and we sank into a habitual silence, only this time, the silence was more aggressive. It demanded that I feel it, the disappointment sitting in her heart to have to take *umafungwashe wakhe*<sup>2</sup> to the doctor for a homosexuality cure that she did not even know existed.

However, sitting in that passenger seat, a fire was lit inside me. I was in anticipation. Mama did not know this. She did not know that her daughter, the one filled with “demons” and who was active in “satanic rituals” as she always said, had wanted to see a mind doctor for years. She did not know that I had wanted to speak to someone, a stranger, about my crumbled life for ages. For me, going there was something my bones had longed for since I started feeling sick many summers ago.

Sitting there, red leather couch underneath, opposite me was a tall and fair-skinned lady with long hair. She was dressed in a long dress with multiple layers of cloth with even more bright colors than a peacock’s tail. Dr Nobuhle, that was her name, and she embodied the SOLER psychologist posture we had learnt about in class during the last semester. The one where the doctor is supposed to sit up straight and open their legs wide enough for comfort but not enough for their opponent’s eyes to view their undergarments.

The wall behind me was beautified with paintings of African women in a relaxed state. Hmm, she views the role of women differently than the rest – I thought. The wall on her left-hand was full of framed academic qualifications, from a degree in nursing to a PhD in clinical psychology. How old was this woman? Where did she get the time to study for all this? On my left-hand side stood a red cloth-covered side-table with a half-full tissue box. She knew it. She knew that she made people cry a lot. It was probably in her job description. And maybe, as a psychology student, I was yet to read about this in the following years of study. Perhaps develop the same skill.

Dr Nobuhle greeted me with a smile and a stale compliment, “*Awusemhle*,”<sup>3</sup> she has probably said this to all her first-time patients before with the aim of making them comfortable in her presence. I smile and say “*Enkosi*,” but I do not actually believe her. My self-esteem is that close to the floor, and it is not about to be redeemed by the same person whose said mission is to separate me from my being.

# Nathi Poswa

After the traditional greeting, she handed me a form to read and sign, with the opportunity to ask for clarity of course. My hands were shaking. I was feeling cold, even with the sweat forming under my armpits and between my non-existent breasts. Seeing the words “Confidentiality Clause” printed in bold lifted the anxiety off me, and I signed the contract immediately. However, I still posed the question to her.

*“Ithetha ukuthini lento ye confidentiality clause?”*<sup>5</sup>

I had to take caution because I did not want the content of our discussion shared with my mother – the person who sent me here and is paying for all this – as she was one of my many issues.

4

But she put the form aside, and asked me one question. One question that would shift the blueprint of my future for the better.

*“Ungubani, yintoni onondixelela yona ngesiqu sakho?”*<sup>6</sup>

I stuttered. What did she mean by that? I’m Qhawekazi, duh. Did the biographical data section of my form not provide that detail already? I asked her what it was that she wanted. Please doctor, be a little more specific.

*“Wawuzalelwe phi? Ukhule njani?”*<sup>7</sup>

And so began the hour-long epileptic episode of crying. The only words I can remember uttering to successful completion were *“Ndandizalelwe kwi sbhedlele sase Rhawutini ngonyaka ka 1997...”*<sup>8</sup>

And there, she had done it, the doctor had used her “make them cry” on me.

I had to take a deep breath as soon as I stepped outside, and I called mama to let her know that I was done. I had obeyed her, but the doctor had not.

## Notes

- 1 IsiXhosa: I want to take you there myself so you do not run away, I want to see you go in myself.
- 2 Her firstborn daughter.
- 3 You look beautiful.
- 4 Thank you.
- 5 What does the confidentiality clause concept entail?
- 6 Who are you, what can you tell me about yourself?
- 7 Where were you born? How did you grow up?
- 8 I was born at a hospital in Gauteng in 1997...



# Enobong Etuk



*Enobong E. Etuk is a student of the University of Uyo, in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, where she studies Human Anatomy. She is a creative writer with enormous promise and important stories to tell. She writes works that provoke thought on topics of gender and social justice.*

*Enobong is passionate about writing short stories and her narratives are deeply personal. Her work has appeared in River Bird Magazine and elsewhere. Outside writing, she enjoys time out with friends and family.*



# Enobong Etuk

## On Such Days

You are supposed to go straight to the office to face the disciplinary panel where you will either be dismissed or paid in lieu of notice. But somewhere you find yourself in her office, welcomed into a calming space with ambient lighting and Deuter softly playing in the background.

You sit on the couch facing Dr Temi, who sits behind her desk wearing a pantsuit with a pad and a pen in her hands. Her hair is pulled back in cornrows, pushing her face into sharp focus, forcing you to look at her, to really see her. You shift your gaze from her face to the dusky purple wall and the giant blue painting behind her desk.

"How are you, Ayomide?"

She says your name; the way your boss would say it, the way Dara, your wife, would not say it. You take a deep breath; you want to tell her that you don't know what you feel, don't have the vocabulary to describe your feelings.

"I'm fine." You finally find the word and force a smile. This smile is fake and you know that you are afraid to show her what you feel for fear of looking like a wimp.

"How is your work? How are you coping?"

There is an awkward silence, but she waits patiently, not asking further questions, just awaiting your reply.

"I have a shitty job." You stop and look at her. She is writing something on her pad. "Who doesn't?" you continue.

She smiles at you with her eyes. "It's fine, we don't have to talk about it."

You release a deep breath you didn't know you were holding.

"How is your wife?"

At that you get impatient. "Listen, Dr Temi, I didn't come here to discuss my wife." You clench your teeth, take your suitcase and storm out of her office.



You do not go home. Rather you find yourself in a club with sorrow-laden eyes. "I will survive," you mutter to yourself, to the glass of alcohol in front of you. You force down the liquid, down your tummy, your first taste of alcohol. You let your mind wander and wander. You ought to be a happy man. That was the initial goal, but limitations had set in, and now you alone know where the shoe pinches.

You are so lost in thought that you do not notice her by your side.

"Mind if I join you?" she flutters her lashes.

"Ok," you nod to affirm this.

"If I may ask, what is a cutie like you doing in a club all by yourself?"





"I needed to be alone," you clear your throat and drag your gaze up to her face, expecting to see the usual sex worker, desperately in need of a man. But you freeze, stunned. She isn't dressed as such, but your eyes get stuck on her full breasts, forming a hard knot of desire in your belly. As if suddenly realizing that you are married, you rise to your feet.

"Sorry, I got to go." You hesitate, clearing your throat again.

"Call me." She fishes out a note from her small handbag and hands it over to you.

"Ok," you barely reply as you turn to leave.

4



You drag your worn-out body to your room and lock the door behind you. You now enjoy solitude. It gives you the chance to beat your mind into submission. In your room, you pick up your diary and start to read out to yourself commitments which are becoming unbearably heavy. The cost of caring for your aged mother had become a big hole in your pocket. So was the maintenance of your car and the monthly allowance of your house help. Not to talk of your regular bills: rent, electricity, tax...

"Damn it," you shout as rage fills your heart. You close the accursed book and fling it furiously against the wall of your bedroom. No more tears. You will not sit down and cry like a child. You will face your problems squarely, grapple with them like a man with courage.



"Ayo, who is this woman you are seeing? You think I wouldn't find out that you are having an affair?"

Your wife starts to nag. Because it is so typical of her, you don't say a word. So typical of her not to read the pain in your voice and see it in your eyes.

"I thought I married a man but..."

You bring your fist down on her jaw with such force that she staggers back on her feet, eyes red-rimmed and wide.

"Ay... Ayo," she stammers, tears filling her eyes.

Guilt sits on your chest, weighing you down like a ton of bricks. In that moment, you want to reach out to her and take back the horrible thing you had just done, but the thing on your chest won't let you. You storm out of the house, leaving your wife in shock.



"I'm glad you came, Mr Ayo," Dr Temi's eyes meet yours first, and you smile in return. Your gaze sweeps down her features, and you think of how lucky her husband must be.

"I wasn't hoping to see you today. I thought you had terminated the appointment," she said as she pushed away the laptop on her desk. "Let me help you, Ayo."

You close your eyes, breathless. "You don't understand what it is like to be in my shoes. You don't know how I try to live up to the image my wife has of me. How can you possibly help me?"

## On Such Days

"You're absolutely right. I haven't had your experience, but I'm interested in what you've gone through. Tell me."

1

"I lost my job." You bend your head. "My mother has cancer and needs urgent treatment." You turn away, hating yourself for revealing even a glimpse of your vulnerability.

"Does your wife know about this?"

You stifle a laugh, "I can't tell her."

"Why is that?"

4

"I have been trying to keep things together with the hope that all will be well, you know, play the man." You bite your lips. "She will be disappointed in me because I have failed her." You glance up at her. She is still writing on her pad.

"If you woke up tomorrow and everything was just the way you wanted it to be, what would be different? How would you be different?"

You close your eyes and see your wife, the way she had looked at you the night you hit her. You see your mother smiling down at you and your boss, patting your shoulder. The image breaks apart. You open your eyes and you are still sitting there, Dr Temi in front of you, awaiting your reply.

"I will be a happy man."

"Then let your wife know you lost your job. Let her see the magnitude of the challenges. Together you can face them."

You give a hard shake of your head and lift your eyes to the ceiling for a moment. When you have more control, you lock eyes with her.

"Won't she think less of me?" You say the words fast, as though it hurt too much to let them linger on your lips.

"Love is supposed to be based on trust. It's something rare and beautiful when people can confide in each other without fearing what the other person will think."



When you are outside, you flip open your phone and call your wife. On the second ring, you hear her pick up.

"I'm sorry for hitting you," you clear your throat.

"Ayo?" Alarm sounds in her voice. "What is it?"

A lump forms in your throat, "It is nothing bad. We just need to talk."

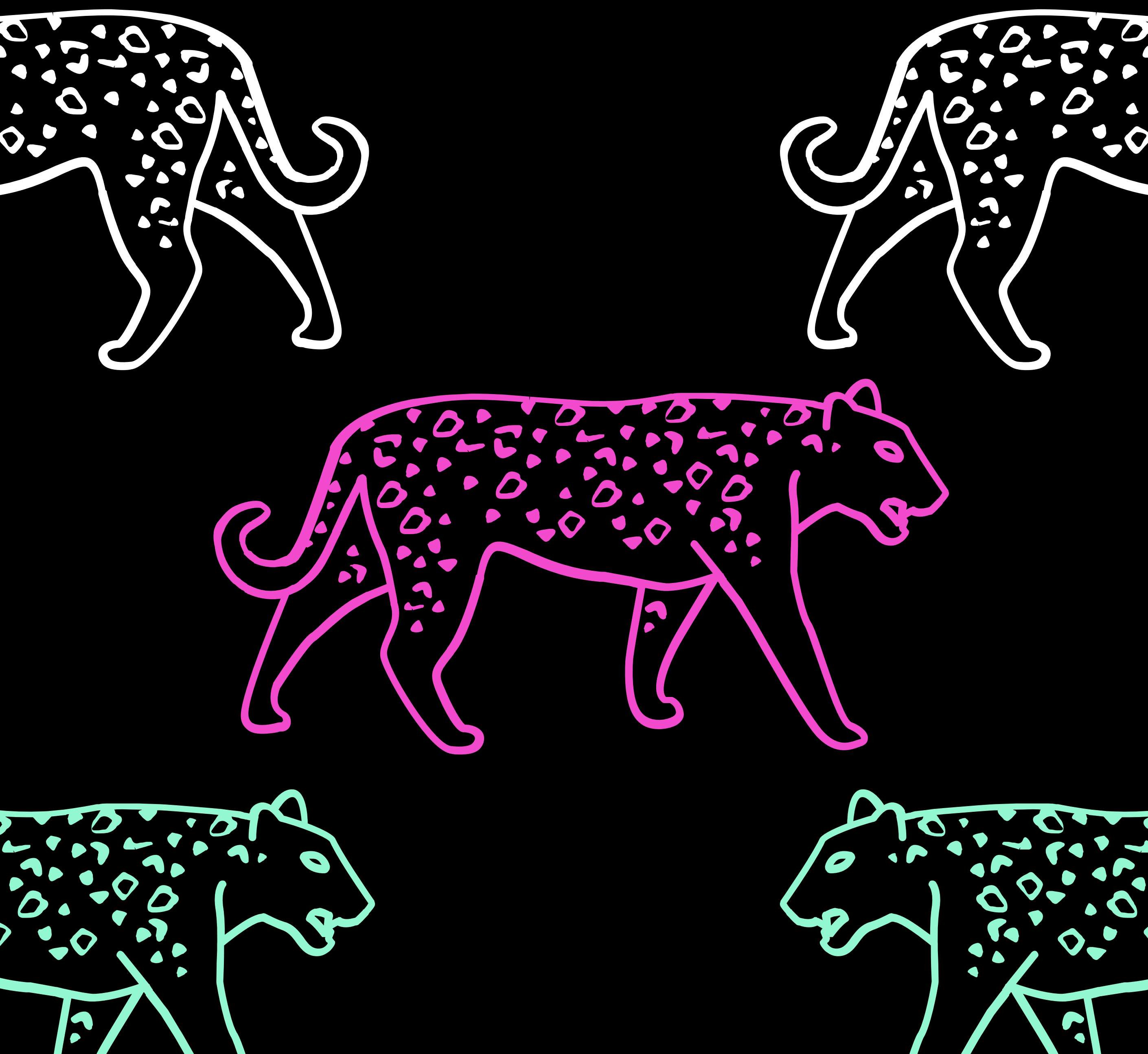
She hesitates, "Are you sure you're ok?"

"Yes." You release a deep breath. "I'm coming home."



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PLAYS



# Mbasa Tsetsana



*Mbasa Tsetsana is a 29-year-old actor, writer and director from East London. He has written for Isithembiso and eKasi: Our Stories. He has produced five plays, including Waiting for Nelson and The Chronicles of Jack, for theatres across South Africa. At the Roodepoort Theatre's Youth Arts Festival, Waiting for Nelson won the award for best drama.*

*Tsetsana won a Golden Horn Award at the 2019 SAFTAs, among other recognitions in the industry. He has a BA (Dramatic Arts) from Wits and remains highly active in film and theatre in South Africa. His film The President In My Pocket is currently in development.*



# Mbasa Tsetsana

## Thula Mntanam

### Introduction

*Thula Mntanam* [*Be Quiet Baby*] is an English and isiXhosa tragi-comic play inspired by Pierre Perol's *The Dead Will Awaken*. Tsetsana makes use of a Brechtian-style dialectical process in the development of his dramatic material and the production thus partly takes the form of a nested play or 'play within a play'.

In three Acts, *Thula Mntanam* sweeps across time from the South African contemporary political context back into the 19th-century history of the AmaXhosa nation, creating an extended socio-political metaphor in which the past and present are interpreted and understood in light of each other.

### Cast

Two female performers and two male performers each playing multiple parts.

### Characters

Minister 1  
Minister 2  
Minister 3  
Tyson  
A – female individual  
K – female individual  
J – male individual  
T – male individual

# Mbasa Tsetsana

1

## Thula Mntanam

### Act I Scene I

*A fatigued Tyson approaches the first Minister.*

**Minister 1:** Comrade Tyson! Ah, it has been what... A year?

**Tyson:** Ten, Mr Minister.

**Minister 1:** My goodness! That long? Well, as I'm sure you understand, abusing... I mean running the country is no small task.

**Tyson:** Absolutely, Mr Minister.

**Minister 1:** And as the Minister of Nonsensical Nonsense, I need to ensure that, well, that there is no nonsense. How can I help you old friend?

**Tyson:** Well, comrade Minister, I along with many of our comrades in MK thought that things would get better. That you would provide...

**Minister 1:** A better life for all.

**Tyson:** Yes. Sir. So, I was wondering if your department could help me with a...

**Minister 1:** Jobs... are a tricky business comrade Tyson. Because, if you think about it, the glass is neither half full, nor half empty. But when the chicken comes before the egg, one realizes that, if you push this side, and pull that side, you will find a balance.

**Tyson:** I'm not sure I understand Sir.

**Minister 1:** What I am saying is that there are currently no vacancies. But you are a comrade! Something is bound to come about. Try the Minister of Corruption, Coercion and Consumption. You are bound to find something there.

*Tyson is adamant, yet he bows, leaves and once again embarks on his long and complicated journey. Fatigued, he approaches Minister 2, who is on the phone. He puts the phone down and embraces Tyson.*

**Minister 2:** Comrade! Commander! Leadership! Chief! How long has it been now? A year?

**Tyson:** Ten, Mr Minister.

**Minister 2:** My goodness! That long? Well, as I'm sure you understand, abusing... I mean running the country is no small task.

**Tyson:** Absolutely, Mr Minister.



# Mbasa Tsetsana

## Thula Mntanam

**Tyson:** Well, comrade Minister, I along with many of our comrades in MK thought that things would get better. That you would provide...

**Minister 2:** A better life for all.

**Tyson:** Yes. Sir. So I was wondering if your department could help me with a...

**Minister 2:** Jobs... are a tricky business comrade Tyson. Because if you think about it, the glass is neither half full, nor half empty. But when the chicken comes before the egg, one realizes that if you push this side, and pull that side, you will find a balance.

**Tyson:** I'm not sure I understand Sir.

**Minister 2:** What I am saying is that there are currently no vacancies. But you are a comrade! You are bound to find something.

*A disheartened Tyson bows and leaves. Gutted, he embarks on his long and complicated journey and arrives at Minister 3. They embrace.*

**Minister 3:** Comrade Tyson.

**Tyson:** Minister, I do not want to waste your time. I need a job.

**Minister 3:** You're in luck! As the Minister of People, Provision and...

**Minister 1 and 2:** NO!

**Minister 3:** (*Confused*) As the Minister of People, Provision and...

**Minister 1 and 2:** Cabinet reshuffle! Cabinet reshuffle! Cabinet reshuffle!

**Minister 3:** (*Nervous*) Whoa comrades! What I meant was, as the Minister of Pettiness, Pompousness and Protection...

**Minister 1 and 2:** Protection?!

**Minister 3:** ... of the Party.

**Minister 1 and 2:** Good.

**Minister 3:** I now, unfortunately, cannot offer you a job. You see Tyson...

**Tyson:** Yes, I know. Jobs are a tricky business comrade Tyson. Because if you think about it, the glass is neither half full, nor half empty. But when the chicken comes before the egg, one realizes that if you push this side, and pull that side, you will find a balance.

**Minister 3:** I'm glad you understand. But you are a comrade! Something is bound to come up.

# Mbasa Tsetsana

## Thula Mntanam

*Tyson bows and embarks on his long and complicated journey. Now deflated and incredibly fatigued, he stops. He watches cars go by. He takes a placard that has his credentials which read: 'Struggle veteran. MK loyalist. Fought for your freedom.' After a beat, he drops the placard.*

### Act I Scene II

T: Eish guys, I'm sorry, but I didn't feel it.

K: You didn't *feel* it? You didn't *FEEL* it?! You mean like *feel* it feel it? As in feel...

T: Yes, damn it, feel it! I didn't feel it. It wasn't tangible in the moment. I didn't get a sensation in my... I didn't feel it okay!

J: Leadership, in case you haven't noticed, we have an audience. So your feelings can voetsek, neh?

*T and J get into a squabble, with the other characters trying to stop it. Eventually, A does.*

A: What the hell guys? Let's get into position and do the bloody play okay. That's what we're being paid to do.

K: Oh, are we now?

A: Do you have something to add K?

K: I was just... You know, are we *really* going to get paid seeing as we haven't started doing the...

J: Politics after the production please.

T: That's ironic, isn't it?

J: What?

T: We're doing a political play, and you're saying we should only bring in the political after the play. But anyway, we got the funding, so let's do the work. Not that *they* will care.

J: Like I said, politics *after* the production please. Now, stomachs and egos in, creativity out!

*J and T clear and prepare the scene for the next Act for K and A. K will have a mop in hand in the next scene.*



# Mbasa Tsetsana

## Thula Mntanam

### Act II Scene I: 'The Play'

A: Don't do that man! I could've killed you.

K: With a mop?

A: You underestimate me *wena*.<sup>1</sup> Where have you been?

*SILENCE*

A: K? Come now, speak to Aunty AA.

K: I went to see him.

A: Who's *him*?

K: Something smells nice. Did you get a new perfume?

A: Perfume mnyefum! WHO DID YOU GO SEE?

K: Eish A, just leave it girl.

A: Don't tell me you went to see...

*BEAT*

A: No! What, are you crazy? Do you want a death wish? Dad will kill you!

K: I know, but...

A: BUT BUT BUT! But nothing man! He told you to stay away from that boy.

K: He's not a boy.

A: He's got a *pipi* doesn't he? Listen my sister, you need to stop this. You know how dad feels about him. How he feels about *them*.

K: Dad, dad, dad! Why does everything have to be about him?

A: Why does everything have to... I'll tell you why everything is about utata. He sacrificed *everything* for us. Made sure we went to school, got an education and have a roof over our heads.

*T walks on, but waits and listens before entering the scene.*

# Mbasa Tsetsana

## Thula Mntanam

K: A roof over our heads? You call this a roof over our heads? He was in the struggle A. Went to prison more times than you can remember. I may have not been born yet, but I know. I know it all. When he was gone for months, you would have to sit in this God-forsaken place, having to worry about the police coming. He abandoned you. And for what? Look at what his beloved politics is doing now. What has it done for the people it freed? What did it do for *him*? He's still unemployed. He didn't get a fancy job and get to steal the people's money. All we have is African National Corruption. So screw dad and screw the bloody politics of this country!

T: ENOUGH! You ungrateful little... Is this how I taught you to behave? Is this what I raised? An ungrateful, disrespectful little...

K: Raised me? Half the time you're drunk!

*T raises his hand to strike K.*

A: Tata no!

T: Okay. That's it. I'm done. I'm sorry. I'm not feeling it.

*K and A look at each other in nervous astonishment.*

K: *(Attempting to improvise unsuccessfully)* Uhm... Yes tata. Of course you don't feel it. You have no feelings to begin with!

T: K, let it go.

K: What do you mean 'let it go'? T.D. Jakes 'Let it Go', or 'let it go' let it go? <sup>2</sup>

T: I don't know. Like I said earlier, I'm just not feeling it.

J: *(Marching onto the stage)* Not feeling it?! In case you didn't hear me earlier, we have an audience. And funding! We have to do a play!

T: Oh don't worry, I know, but...

J: But what? This isn't a democracy chief. We *have* to deliver.

T: Oh? We have to deliver? Have *they* been delivering?

J: Heh wena! Politics after the production man!

K: I won't lie though. I wasn't feeling it either.

J: Oh great. So now it's about feelings. I'm stuck with divas.

*At this point, everyone is on stage.*



# Mbasa Tsetsana

## Thula Mntanam

A: Actually, I'm also not feeling it.

T: And it's tiring being backstage. I'm tired of waiting.

K: We all are! Waiting for water... Waiting for the load shedding to end. Waiting for jobs.

J: But we have a job! Right here, and right now, and instead of doing the damn thing, you're out here complaining.

T: Yah sure, but after this job, how long will we have to wait until we get the next one?

*SILENCE*

T: We're only remembered *if* we win an international award or when we die. And then, like Utat'Rolihlahla Nelson Mandela, they promise to name a bridge, university or street after us.

K: I know right? And now that I think about, people treat utata like he's God. Sure, he had an important part to play in the fight for democracy. But what about Tambo, Sisulu, Sobukwe, Biko, Hani? And on top of that, EVERYTHING is actually named after him.

J: Dude, he is Xhosa, like you. You should be proud.

K: I am proud. But yah man. I'm just saying what most people are afraid to express you know.

A: She has a point though. Everything is named after him. Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Nelson Mandela Bridge, Mandela Street, Mandela University. I mean, the guy is even on our money now. *Utata*<sup>3</sup> is everywhere. Next thing you know, they'll name the days of the week after him. Mandela, Tuesdela, Wednesdela, Thursdela, Fridela, Saterdela, Sundela.

T: All I'm saying is, don't love me and cry for me when I'm dead. Appreciate me and my work while I'm still alive.

A: Hallelujah Amen! We need to make a statement and do something that is memorable then.

K: Yes! We need something fresh, something that hasn't been done before.

J: HIV/AIDS, maybe?

T: Yah. Because that has *NEVER* been done before...

K: I'll take that as metaphorical 'yes'. Anyone else up for my idea?

*AWKWARD SILENCE*

# Mbasa Tsetsana

## Thula Mntanam

J: I have an idea and its perfect guys. What if we...

T: (*Interrupting J*) Why must we always listen to you? Have you been to the bush?

J: What did you say to me?

A: Eish, amaXhosa and their pride!

K: Come on guys, please. No politics, remember?

T: Why not? It's relevant.

J: I hate to admit it, but he's right. It is relevant.

A: This is so awkward. Hell, even a play about the bloody Anglo-Boer War would be better than this.

T: What did you say?

A: Nothing! Please, don't mind me!

T: No, for real. What did you say about the Anglo-Boer War?

J: T, we are not going to do a play on the Anglo-Boer War.

T: (*Excited*) Not about the Anglo-Boer War. What if we did a play about Nongqawuse?

A: How much?

T: How much what?

A: What do you mean?

T: What do you mean, 'What do I mean'? You asked me 'How much?' and I said 'How much what?'

A: What?

T: *Eh voetsek man!*<sup>4</sup> You're making me dizzy. As I was saying, I think we should do a play about Nongqawuse.

K: What in God's name is that? Some sort of disease?

T: It's the name of a young Xhosa girl.

K: Her mother was clearly possessed when she named her.

T: You shouldn't speak ill of the dead.



# Mbasa Tsetsana

## Thula Mntanam

K: What are you on about?

T: She's dead. Well, she died... Over 150 years ago.

K: The mother or the girl?

J: *Voetsek maan wena.* The girl!

K: Okay, so what about this No... (*She struggles to pronounce Nongqawuse*) What about this girl?

T: Yah neh. It's tough in Africa. NO-NGQA-WUSE.

K: How are we going to tell a story about a girl whose name we can barely pronounce?

T: Whose name *YOU* can barely pronounce girlish. Anyway, you guys sort of, kind of know the story, right?

A: I think so. Wasn't she a prophetess?

T: Yebo yes.

K: So... Let's hear it.

T: Hear what?

K: The story.

T: We're actors. We show, we don't just tell.

A: But, we don't know the whole story.

T: Then we improvise.

J: You must be joking.

T: I'm being as serious as a heart attack.

J: Well I feel like I'm having one right now.

T: Guys, come on! Accept the proposal. There's no 'No' with us. Let's do it.

*The players are unsure and uneasy, looking at each other with angst-filled gazes.*

T: Okay. So we've wasted enough time already. Quick chat, then we do this.

J: Yoh! (*Claps once*)

# Mbasa Tsetsana

## Thula Mntanam

*The players get into a huddle and a discussion commences for a few beats. Responses are mimed.*

J: Here goes nothing.

*J takes a moment before delivering the first line of the next Act.*

### Act III Scene I: 'The Play Within the Play'

J: Okay. So, according to Wikipedia, it's the year 1856. And the setting is the Eastern Cape.

K: You're going to have to be more specific.

*J is at a loss until...*

T: It is the year 1856, in the Eastern Cape, near the mouth of the Gxarha River.

K: What is up with all these weird names?

*They start to re-enact what they are speaking about with physical theatre and mime.*

A: Herds of thirsty cattle were gathering in the late afternoon at the pools, to quench their thirst.

K: Everyone knew that they were sick.

J: With mucous membranes and secreting yellow pus speckled with thick metallic blood.

A: The Xhosa were losing many heads of cattle. The disease had been brought by...

All: The white man... *(Repeated melodiously and absurdly)*

T: Umlungu! The white scum of the sea. The disease was called lung sickness.

A: On one particular day, a man appeared among the local people. He spoke to them. He was now a man of the cloth. A missionary had converted him to the white man's religion.

J: And he felt obligated to save the souls of his tribe. His name was Xolile Mawethu.

*They all turn to face J who addresses them.*

J: Hear me, my people, for I bring promise of a better life. Forget your ancestors, for there is only one God, and in Him, and only Him shall you find salvation. God is punishing you! See how He makes your cattle sick. They will all die unless you change your ways!

K: But no-one was interested.



# Mbasa Tsetsana

## Thula Mntanam

A: In the white man's God.

T: *(Walks over to J who is now looking inconspicuous, scratching his neck region frantically, trying his level best to not look inconspicuous)* But Xolile had a terrible secret.

A: *(To J)* You did, didn't you?

J: What? I don't know what you're talking about! *(He continues to preach, going from character to character, baptizing and praying for them, scratching when the opportunity presents itself)*

K: For one brief moment in his life... He had succumbed to the temptations of the milky white flesh that he found so alluring.

*Everyone gasps and turns to look at J.*

J: No guys, it's a *secret*. Meaning that you don't know what I have done yet!

A, K and T: Oh!!!

A: It was kind of cool though, you know? The stopping in unison and...

K: FOR ONE BRIEF MOMENT IN HIS LIFE... He had succumbed to the temptations of the milky white flesh that he found so alluring.

T: The forbidden fruit!

J: He was punished for his lust and caught the white man's disease.

All: SYPHILIS!

*The cast uses grotesque physical expressions to express the disease and repeat the word over and over for a short period of time. J slowly but surely starts getting sick.*

A: And even though he believed in the words of the gospel, he sought the help of a traditional healer, who told him how to get rid of his affliction.

*The cast form a semi-circle, encircling T, as the sangoma, and J.*

T: *Vumani bo!*

A and K: *Siyavuma!*

J: I agree.

T: *Vumani bo!*

J and K: *Siya vuma!*<sup>5</sup>

# Mbasa Tsetsana

## Thula Mntanam

J: I don't understand. I already said that I agree.

T: Find a young virgin...

K: He said.

T: And defile her flesh. Pass on the disease to her, and you will be cured.

K: And it came to pass that there was a suitable maiden in the village.

A: Her name was Nongqawuse.

J: He tempted her... Promising her gifts and fortunes unimaginable...

A: (*While resisting J*) But she resisted his advances.

A: She was only 13 and innocent to the ways of men.

*BEAT*

A: One morning when she was walking to fetch water...

J: He followed her...

A: ... and hid in the bushes, waiting for her to return.

J: He surprised her!

*Physical and metaphorical re-enactment of the rape is played out. A performs a slow and controlled dance, then she becomes frantic, faster and more chaotic, with T leading and A becoming a mere puppet in said 'dance'.*

J: Surprise!

A: And made his intentions clear... She pleaded for him to stop.

*A's breathing quickens, her screams muffled by the intensity of the 'dance' and J's control.*

J: But no one heard her screams for help.

A: And he defiled her.

K: 'Mind your own business,' the onlookers muttered to one another. 'It doesn't concern us,' said another. And as the so-called good people did nothing, Nongqawuse lost a part of herself that she could never again get back.

A: She ran to the river to cleanse herself of the sin. And the water turned red.



# Mbasa Tsetsana

## Thula Mntanam

K: Her innocence was washed away with the tide.

J: But he wasn't cured (*Staggering and coughing*).

K: And the weeks passed...

A: And passed...

*They circle J*

K: And passed...

A: And passed...

T: But he was not cured. The disease festered...

*J is now on his knees and is incredibly weak... J starts to panic, scratching his entire body wildly. He also hallucinates, reaching out to inanimate objects, only seen by his delirium.*

T: ... Spreading through his whole body.

J: Believe in God!

A: He said.

J: He will cleanse you of your sins!

A: It began to rot his brain.

J: (*Slurring accompanied by involuntary fits*) For I am the... Only through me can you... Ahhh!

K: The people turned their backs on him.

J: Forgive them dear Lord... for they know not what they... You are the way, the truth... I see a light. I know not what to do.

K: One day, he ended up in the river.

J: In the name of The Father.

K: And he saw Nongqawuse with her friend, Nonkosi.

J: They are coming to fetch water... (*J creeps closer to the girls*) And his evil plan was borne upon the wind. He thought of a way to get revenge against his people who had turned their backs on him.

# Mbasa Tsetsana

## Thula Mntanam

A: Oh wow Nonkosi, look how clear the water is.

T: A slight breeze had come, and rustled the leaves of the wild banana trees.

K: Nongqawuse look... there's something in the water.

A: I see it.

J: *(In a deep voice)* Nongqawuse!

A: It is calling me! Can you hear it?

T: I'm scared....

*Everyone freezes*

K: *(Aside)* Now this is the point where common sense would kick in and tell you to get the hell out of there. A voice is coming from the water. Clearly something isn't right. Leave! But do you think they did that? Nope! And you wonder why the black guy always dies first in the movie.

*They unfreeze*

J: Nongqawuse! I am the voice of your ancestors.

K: Let's go Nongqawuse!

T: Yes, girl! Run!

A: Wait....

*T is in absolute dismay.*

T: Eish!!!

J: I have a prophecy. This prophecy I need you to tell your people, for you have been chosen.

T: Let's leave.... Too late! The cookie has crumbled. He told her to...

J: Tell the AmaXhosa they must destroy all their crops and kill all their cattle. In return, the spirits will sweep the British into the sea and the dead cattle will rise up from the ashes. They will be healthier and stronger and the crops will be replenished.

J and T: *(To A and K)* GO!

K: Nongqawuse, I don't think...



# Mbasa Tsetsana

## Thula Mntanam

J and T: (*To A and K*) And tell them...

K: That this is a good...

J and T: (*To A and K*) Of the prophecy! Go!

K: And so they went back to the village.

A: (*Tentatively*) Listen to me... I have been chosen.

K: But no-one was interested.

A: The ancestors have spoken to me.

J: But no one listened.

T: For she was just a young *girl* from the village.

A: I have been chosen to tell you the great news! The dead will awaken!

K: But they mocked her.

*The characters laugh at her, whisper about her, mock and point at her.*

K: Stop it! Listen to her. She tells the truth.

T: But no-one cared.

A: You have to believe me! The dead will awaken.

## Act III Scene II

*T becomes Sir George Grey and K becomes the Scribe, with overacted, accentuated and absurd British accents.*

T: Your Majesty... Hmmm, no. That won't do. Your *Majesty*... *YOUR* Majesty...

K: So, will that be three 'Your Majesties' sire?

*T gives K a blank stare.*

K: Right.

T: I am reporting to you on the native problem. The animals are resilient and...

K: I beg your pardon Sir.

# Mbasa Tsetsana

## Thula Mntanam

T: Oh, what is it now?!

K: My lord, it's just... Well... I was thinking... Isn't the use of the term 'animal' a bit... Well, a bit animalistic your lordship?

T: I pay you to write! Not to think! Now, where was I... Ah, yes. The ANIMALS are proving to be difficult to overthrow, but I have an informant among them that has told me of a strange prophecy and how it came about. I do indeed see a way I can use this to our advantage. Yours in service, Sir George Grey.

K: Sir, do you not think Her Majesty would perhaps want to know exactly how...?

*T gives her a death stare.*

K: Alright! Write, do not think. Got you Sire.

T: The next day when Nongqawuse and Nonkosi went to fetch water.

J: The Governor was waiting for them.

T: *(Mispronouncing all of the names terribly)* Nongqawuse... Nonkosi... Have you told them of the prophecy?

A: They are speaking to me again Nonkosi. But this time they sound... I don't know, a bit different.

K: Nongqawuse, please. Let's go. You saw how the village reacted.

T: You will be punished if you do not tell the truth.

A: But I am just a girl. They are not listening to me.

T: Go and speak to your uncle.

A: Which one?

T: *(Totally caught off-guard)* Uhm... That one... The one who explains prophecies.

A: I think he... them... *They* mean uTat'Mhlakaza.

T: Yes! That one. UTat Mahlakeza.



# Mbasa Tsetsana

## Thula Mntanam

### Act III Scene III

*A and K sojourn as we transition into the village's traditional tabernacle.*

J: *(As an elderly character with a crooked back, he addresses the audience, but the other players react to him)* Eh, molweni madoda, nani bafazi. I have some news. My niece has received a miraculous gift from our ancestors which will save us from the ones that come from the sea. *Abelungu!*<sup>6</sup>

*Murmuring and whispers begin as J introduces Nongqawuse (A) to the gathered 'crowd'.*

A: Let all cultivation cease. New grain pits must be dug.

K: Her voice soon became strong as people were finally listening to her. She became confident. Some might say, a bit too confident.

A: Bigger dwellings must be built.

T: She had fallen victim... *(smirks)* ... To the charm of power.

K: And she became intoxicated upon it.

A: Hear me, my people, for I have been chosen.

K: One minute she was just a simple girl from a small village, now everyone was listening to her.

A: Her life now had purpose.

K: The orders came like daggering arrows.

A: All the cattle must be slaughtered...

*They act out what is being dictated by 'Nongqawuse'.*

T: For they have been bred by polluted hands!

A: Strong cattle kraals must be constructed. Hides must be cut into milk pouches.

J: And soon the British will be pushed back into the sea!

A: For the day will come, my people, when the dead will awaken, and everything will be restored. Food will be plentiful again. I have spoken and so say the lords. *Naphakade!*<sup>7</sup>

All: *Naphakade!*

J: Eh... Sorry sisi. But when will this all happen?

# Mbasa Tsetsana

## Thula Mntanam

*K looks at A, who nods.*

K: The prophecy will be fulfilled on February the 18th.

T: (*T whispers in A's ear with A reporting what he says as if she is possessed*) For on that day...

A: For on that day...

T: The sun will turn red as blood.

A: The sun will turn red as blood.

A and T: And the dead shall awaken from their slumber.

*T laughs sadistically.*

J: But some of the leaders wanted proof.

K: How can we be sure you tell the truth?

*The congregation nods in agreement. T walks away, a nonbeliever, not believing in the prophecy. He sets himself up so that he can beat a drum or any form of rumbling instrument offstage.*

A: Gather all the leaders and I shall show you.

J: On a day, when the sun was shining, all the tribal leaders gathered at the mouth of the Gxarha River from which the sea could clearly be seen.

A: Do your eyes thirst for proof? Then gaze out to the ocean.

*The drums begin to rumble.*

T: At first there was a low rumbling of rocks tumbling down to the sea. All were now afraid.

A: Look! They appear!

T: And just beyond the waves...they heard the sound of many oxen bellowing over the surf, and they appeared to them. It was a vision of what was to be and a black mass of people came forwards and backwards, with the waves crashing around them. They reached out...

A: Do you see them? They are the dead that will awaken.

T: (*Now a conformed believer, walks back to join the people*) And for the first time, everyone believed.



# Mbasa Tsetsana

## Thula Mntanam

K: Every man must kill his cattle...

A: And acquire its dying breath!

J: It's soul!

A: For it will rise up again on the day of resurrection.

T: And the chiefs ordered the people to do so.

K: One hundred (*K collapses*).

A: One thousand (*A collapses*).

J: Ten thousand (*J collapses*).

*T stands overlooking the 'corpses'.*

K: One hundred thousand.

A: Two hundred thousand.

J: Three hundred thousand cattle were slaughtered.

T: The ground turned red with their sacrificed blood.

K: And she spoke again to the people.

*J, K and T turn to face A.*

A: There are some amongst us that do not believe that the prophecy will come to pass. I need not mention what needs to be done.

J: Brother turned against brother.

*J attacks K, freezing in the middle of the attack.*

K: Families were torn apart.

A: And the Xhosa nation was split in two.

T: The believers.

A: *Amathemba.*

T: And the nonbelievers.

J: *Amahedeni.*

# Mbasa Tsetsana

## Thula Mntanam

A: Kill those that do not believe, for the prophecy will not come true if they live!

K: And the witchhunt began. Neighbours who bore grudges against each other were accused.

A: And their throats were cut. The earth now absorbed the blood of the people. (*Looking back*) Those people. Which is exactly what he wanted.

J: The children were the first to die for there was nothing to eat. Some even resorted to cannibalism.

A: Have faith my people, for our day will come when hope will be borne from the ashes and we will become mighty once again.

T: Days passed...

K: And passed...

J: And passed...

K: And passed.

T: And more people died.

J: December.

T: The land was littered with the rotting carcasses of cattle.

J: January.

T: The stench of corpses filled the land.

A: Soon my people, we will be reborn when we meet our ancestors and the whites will be swept back into the sea from whence they came.

T: Everything was desolate... the land wept (*he smirks*), which is exactly what *they* wanted.

K: Everyone was tired and sick.

A: But the day will arrive!

J: The Xhosa nation was brought to its knees.

T: Which is exactly what *they* wanted!

A: (*Desperate*) But the day will arrive!



# Mbasa Tsetsana

## Thula Mntanam

J: Seventy thousand people were now dead.

A: *(More desperate and anxious)* But the day will arrive! *(A repeats this line, travelling from person to person, family to family, and household to household)* Feed your hunger with hope. Have pride in your belief!

T: And finally the day dawned.

A: February the 18th.

J: Those who were left locked themselves in their dwellings as Nongqawuse had instructed.

A: When you open your doors again, you will be greeted by your ancestors.

J: The people trembled in fear.

T: But they had *faith*.

A: When you open your doors, your beloved cattle will be here, strong and healthy.

T: They had faith!

K: She went with Nonkosi and they waited at the chosen place.

A: Nonkosi, today it will happen. We shall be remembered forever for we have saved the AmaXhosa!

K: They turned their eyes to the ocean.

A: And waited for the sunrise.

T: The dead will awaken.

A: When the sun rises it will be red, a symbol of the blood that has been spilt.

K: The sun rose above the horizon...

*Hope glimmering...*

K: But it was not red... as she had predicted.

T: The dead will awaken!

A: Wait Nonkosi. You will see.

J, K and T: Wait...

# Mbasa Tsetsana

## Thula Mntanam

J: The ancestors did not arise from the sea as she had predicted.

A: Wait Nonkosi...

J, K and T: Wait... Wait... WAIT!!!

T: The dead will awaken!

A: The prophecy will come true.

T: Where are the dead Nonqawuse?

A: (*Panicked*) Look to the ocean!

J: When will the dead awaken? Hm?

A: They will appear!

K: Where are the ancestors?

*They start to push A around, becoming violent and inciting mob justice. The violence escalates.*

J: Where are our cattle?

A: Look to the ocean!

*They all look in unison.*

K: But there was nothing.

*They all look back at Nongqawuse in unison.*

A: Look to the ocean! I see them! Look! Beyond the waves!

K: But the prophecy did not happen.

A: I see them! The dead have awoken!

*J, K and T circle A in a threatening manner, pushing and shoving her.*

K: What have you done?

A: What have I...? No... Greet your ancestors my people!

J: What have you done Nongqawuse?

A: Can't you see the cattle?



# Mbasa Tsetsana

## Thula Mntanam

T: But the people turned against her.

*They pick her up, attempting to take her off stage. A fights vigorously, screaming.*

A: It's because some did not believe!

J: Voetsek! You said the dead will awaken!

A: I spoke the truth!

T: They wanted to kill her.

A: I spoke the truth! The prophecy will come true. It will come true!

*Three gunshots fire, startling the 'mob'.*

## Act III Scene IV

T: In the name of Her Majesty the Queen of England, I command you to put that girl down or I shall be forced to use lethal and brutal force.

*They drop her violently. Nongqawuse weeps.*

T: Nongqawuse, I arrest you on the charge of witchcraft and heresy.

A: The British she so despised had saved her life.

T: You shall be sent to the island and serve out your sentence of... Well I don't know, we'll see after my cup of tea and a scone then, won't we dear heart? Up you get.

*J, K and T start to mutter and murmur 'Nongqawuse the liar', 'Nongqawuse the false prophetess' over one another repeatedly.*

A: The Xhosa nation had almost been destroyed.

J: Nongqawuse! The false prophetess. Your family will be cursed from this day hence.

A: I was chosen. You people are impatient! Keep quiet and listen! *Thulani!* Can you not hear them? Our ancestors are speaking to us! They are calling to us. They say that the time for crying and suffering is over! *Bathi 'Thulani bantwana bam! Thulani! Zizojik'izinto!'*<sup>8</sup>

K: Nongqawuse. The liar.

# Mbasa Tsetsana

## Thula Mntanam

T: Your Majesty... I am pleased to report that the native problem has been contained, due to the destruction of crops and cattle. The natives were easily overthrown. Nongqawuse is contained and this Dark Continent will always and forever remain an empire of England. I have heard a rather strange and curious report. Nongqawuse has been telling those who will listen to her on the island...

J: Of a vision... that a great man will one day be contained on the very same island where she is now a prisoner. He will lead his people and offer them hope. He will eventually set them free and it will herald the end of an era.

T: What absolute bollocks. How can these savages have a saviour when it is us that have saved them? How long will they have to wait before such a man is ever manifested into their god-forsaken DNA?

A: When Nongqawuse was eventually released, everyone shunned her.

K: She returned to the very place where it all began, and she died there, still believing that she had been chosen. Nongqawuse vowed to never talk again, waiting for the ancestors to speak to her. It is said that if you go to the Gxarha River, you can still hear her singing softly...

BEAT

All: *Thula*  
*Mntanam, Thula Mntanam,*  
*Thula Mnntanam*  
*Wen’Ukhalelani? (Zizojik’Izinto)*  
*Thula Mntanam,*  
*Wen’Ukhalelani?*  
*Thula Mntanam,*  
*Wen’Ukhalelani?*  
*Thula Mntanam*  
*Wen’Ukhalelani?*<sup>9</sup>

*Repeat until lights fade to black.*

### Notes

1 *wena*: you

2 T.D. Jakes is a leader in The Potter's House, a large non-denominational church in the US. This is a reference to his bestseller *Let It Go: Forgive So You Will Be Forgiven* (2012).

3 *Utata*: Father

4 *Eh voetsek man!*: Get stuffed man!

# Mbasa Tsetsana

## Thula Mntanam

5 *Vumani bo! / Siyavuma! / ... / Siya vuma!*: Sing it! / We agree! / ... / She agrees!

6 *molweni madoda, nani bafazi... Abelungu!*: hello men, you women... Whites!

7 *Naphakade!*: Forever!

8 *Thulani! ... Bathi 'Thulani bantwana bam! Thulani! Zizojik'izinto!'*: Silence! ... They said, 'Silence my children! Silence! Things will turn around!'

9 *Thula Mntanam... / ... Wen'Ukhalelani? (Zojik'Izinto)*: Be quiet baby... / .... Why are you crying? (Things will turn around)



# Kudzai Mhangwa



*Kudzai Mhangwa was born and raised in Harare, Zimbabwe. He writes poetry, plays, short stories and essays and is also an amateur musician and actor. His work has been featured in House of Mutapa, Atrebla Magazine, Ka'edi Africa, Thinking Out Loud and All Poetry.*

*He is vocal about peace and gender equality (specifically for young women and girls). He founded 'Flower's Touch' as a way of providing relief for underprivileged girls by providing them with reusable sanitary wear.*



# Kudzai Mhangwa

## Come by Here

### Characters

Alien/Aunt Jenesa – Danny’s estranged aunt

Danny – an enthusiastic alien hunter

Martha – a girl lost in the woods

Bon-Bon – Clynn’s girlfriend

Clynn – Bon-Bon’s boyfriend

### Scene I

*The stage is bare.*

*Enter Danny. He is carrying a heavy-looking backpack and a pair of binoculars. He is frantically looking into the binoculars around the stage.*

MARTHA: *(Out of view; singing ‘Khumbaya’)*

*Danny becomes startled and looks around for the origin of the noise.*

*Enter Martha singing.*

DANNY: Hey! This isn’t Sunday morning Mass could you keep it down.

MARTHA: I apologise sir. I sing when I get nervous.

DANNY: Nothing to get nervous about. I bet today we’re definitely making a sighting.

MARTHA: Sighting what?

DANNY: Aliens of course! For the past few months there has been a UFO that has been spotted here and tonight when it arrives I’m going to break the news.

MARTHA: Aliens! Ah! Get me out of here, get me out of here! *(Begins to sing ‘Khumbaya’)*

DANNY: Hey, hey, hey. *(Martha stops singing)* This isn’t church, it isn’t even a Sunday.

MARTHA: It doesn’t have to be a Sunday for me to seek divine intervention and boy do I need it if this alien thing you’re talking about is real.

DANNY: What kind of alien hunter are you? You don’t want to meet aliens?

MARTHA: I’m Martha, just a simple girl. No alien hunter.

DANNY: Danny, your average alien hunter.

# Kudzai Mhangwa

## Come by Here

MARTHA: I doubt there is anything average about an alien hunter.

DANNY: There are millions of us around the world.

MARTHA: You're the first one I've ever met.

DANNY: I'm sure you've met a ton but you just didn't know it. So what are you doing on this perfect landing spot?

MARTHA: I'm looking for my family. We got separated when we went hiking up the mountain. I've been looking for our camping site for hours.

DANNY: That's unfortunate. I'd help you but I can't miss this UFO landing.

MARTHA: Well I'm not surprised. Chivalry disappeared ages ago.

DANNY: Come on Martha, stay a while with me here, and I'll help you find you're camp when I meet the aliens.

MARTHA: You look too smart to believe in aliens.

DANNY: It's more of certainty than belief.

MARTHA: The green monster you see in the middle of the night is your mother with her facial cream on.

DANNY: It's not that! I've actually seen one at my Aunt Jenesa's place. They abducted her four months ago.

MARTHA: That poor woman is your aunt? I read about her in the paper.

DANNY: Poor Aunt Jenesa! She should have believed me when I said her house had the right frequency and coordinates for an extraterrestrial landing.

MARTHA: You honestly think that your aunt was abducted by aliens?

DANNY: What else could it be?

MARTHA: I read a few days back that they suspect that it was a kidnapping.

DANNY: Kidnapping?

MARTHA: Yes, kidnapping. Like taking someone against their will. Kidnapping.

DANNY: Kidnapped (*short pause*) by aliens.

MARTHA: Oh brother.



# Kudzai Mhangwa

## Come by Here

DANNY: Try a little, just a little, to suspend your disbelief.

MARTHA: There are a lot of things I believe in but aliens aren't one of them.

DANNY: Then if you don't believe in aliens, you wouldn't mind staying with me here until I get my proof.

MARTHA: *(Short scream)*

DANNY: Like you said, you don't believe in them, you have nothing to fear.

MARTHA: But it's getting late. I don't want you to get cold out here and my family must be worried sick. Let's go now.

DANNY: A few minutes won't hurt.

MARTHA: *(Mumbles 'Khumbaya' softly)*

*Danny begins searching the area through his binoculars. Bon-Bon and Clynn are heard giggling off stage. Martha runs to Danny's side.*

MARTHA: What was that?

DANNY: Extraterrestrial activity!

MARTHA: Don't say that!

DANNY: You're the one who asked me.

MARTHA: And I needed a little comfort. *(Bon-Bon and Clynn are heard giggling and talking, still off stage)* It's getting closer! We're goners.

DANNY: No way Martha! I'm going to be rich!

## Scene II

*Enter Bon-Bon and Clynn.*

BON-BON: This is a good spot.

CLYNN: I think we should look for another spot.

BON-BON: The further we go, the more we'll get lost.

CLYNN: I want to get lost in your eyes sweetheart.

# Kudzai Mhangwa

## Come by Here

BON-BON: Oh! (*Notices Danny and Martha*). Please excuse us... we're... we're...

MARTHA: Lost? Aren't we all?

BON-BON: (*Looks guilty*) Let's go with that.

DANNY: It's people like you who frighten the aliens away.

BON-BON: I beg your pardon.

DANNY: Messing around in the woods like this, you think the aliens would be happy coming to a place like this?

CLYNN: Hey! Don't speak to my girlfriend like that mister.

DANNY: If I don't tell her, or you, nobody will.

CLYNN: This is a public park, anybody can come here.

DANNY: The least you can do then is respect it. Lovebirds' cliff is right next door, why don't you go over there?

BON-BON: It's always busy on a Friday night. I can see somebody is single. (*Clynn restrains her*) What are you doing here?

DANNY: I'm Danny, your regular alien hunter, and my lovely assistant Martha.

MARTHA: This isn't a magician's act! I'm not your assistant. (*To Bon-Bon and Clynn*) I'm Martha, your regular girl lost in the woods.

BON-BON: I'm Bon-Bon.

CLYNN: And I'm Clynn. Your regular ride or die power couple.

MARTHA: Your names have such a nice ring to them, almost like a sing-song.

BON-BON: We get that a lot. How did you get lost?

MARTHA: I was hiking with my family when we got separated. I've been looking for them for hours.

CLYNN: Then you came across this guy. Your day just gets better doesn't it?

DANNY: Hey, I have a mission to complete here. She just came out of the blue singing campfire songs.

CLYNN: Campfire songs?

# Kudzai Mhangwa

## Come by Here

MARTHA: They soothe me.

BON-BON: Me too. They're good for the car chases.

MARTHA: (*Enthusiastically*) Really? (*She begins to sing 'Khumbaya'*)

BON-BON: Hey! Why not save it for later?

CLYNN: (*To Danny*) Perhaps when the aliens arrive.

DANNY: Why I ought to...

CLYNN: Bring it on Steve Erwin.

BON-BON: (*Calming Clynn down*) Clynn my love, relax.

MARTHA: Steve Erwin was an alligator hunter.

CLYNN: Same difference.

DANNY: You wait until I'm on the front page of the paper when I bust the case of the aliens that visit these woods.

BON-BON: We can make a lot of money from that actually. (*Whispering to Clynn*) We were going to end up on the front page of some newspaper someday anyway.

CLYNN: You have a point.

DANNY: I'm busting this case by myself. I don't need your help. So feel free to leave!

BOB-BON: You can't tell us to leave.

MARTHA: And you promised to help me find my campsite.

DANNY: I will! After I'm done here. (*Suggestively*) My lovely assistant.

MARTHA: Quiet that, you'd never find me working for you even for a million-dollar paycheck.

DANNY: You could bank a million dollars if you decide to comply with me.

CLYNN: I'm in for a million dollars!

DANNY: No ways mister, it's for Martha and me.

CLYNN: If the aliens arrive, then we're all entitled to the story.

BON-BON: Yeah and we want our cut.



# Kudzai Mhangwa

## Come by Here

DANNY: First you wanted to make out now you want to steal my glory.

BON-BON: Our glory (*Snatches binoculars from Danny*) Now how do these work? I want to look smart like those explorer babes when the news crew arrives.

MARTHA: This is not good.

CLYNN: It's great actually, we're going to be filthy rich!

MARTHA: Oh no!

DANNY: (*Fights with Bon-Bon for the binoculars*) I'm not letting you steal my life's destiny.

BON-BON: Our life's work Danny!

*The sound of a spaceship is heard and a bright light suddenly appears on stage.*

DANNY: Finally! (*He grabs the binoculars from Bon-Bon*) Give me that!

CLYNN: I don't believe it.

MARTHA: Nothing good will come of this.

*Martha runs behind Danny for protection. Clynn begins to exit stage slowly then Bon-Bon notices him and pulls him back.*

BON-BON: You're not going anywhere. If this is the greatest discovery in modern history you're going to be here with me.

## Scene III

*Enter Alien/Aunt Jenesa. Alien/Aunt Jenesa screams on seeing Danny, Martha, Bon-Bon and Clynn.*

DANNY: Do not be afraid. We come in peace. (*He makes a strange sign with his hand*)

BON-BON: We didn't come from anywhere, it arrived from that spaceship. (*Looking towards the wings*) Nice ride! I wonder how much that is worth.

CLYNN: Enough to take care of our great-grandsons.

DANNY: (*Quietly*) You're scaring it. (*Loudly*) We are your friends. Come by here.

MARTHA: Come by here... sure (*Sings 'Khumbaya'*)

# Kudzai Mhangwa

## Come by Here

*Bon-Bon, Clynn and Danny shush Martha.*

BON-BON: If you'd be so kind enough as to take a few pictures with us, perhaps even an interview, do you speak any of the Ancient languages?

DANNY: *(To Bon-Bon)* Do you speak any of the Ancient languages?

ALIEN/AUNT JENESA: *(Mumbles)*

BON-BON: Go on, don't be shy.

ALIEN/AUNT JENESA: *(Mumbles anxiously this time)*

CLYNN: It's useless trying to communicate with her. She obviously doesn't understand us. We'll become national heroes if we tie her up and take her to the police.

ALIEN/AUNT JENESA: Noooooooooo!

MARTHA: She understands English? Isn't that a surprise?

DANNY: You have no right to tie up another living thing and submit it to the authorities.

CLYNN: People go hunting all of the time.

DANNY: This isn't hunting. The Earth and the universe are finally shaking hands!

BON-BON: *(Stretching out her hand towards Alien/Aunt Jenesa)* Speaking of which, I'm Bon-Bon and that is my boyfriend Clynn. Who would you be?

MARTHA: Don't touch her! Who knows what radioactive ectoplasm she has on her.

ALIEN/AUNT JENESA: *(Makes weeping noises)*

BON-BON: Look what you've done, you've hurt her feelings. *(She embraces Alien/Aunt Jenesa)* She is completely harmless.

DANNY: Hey, don't touch her. She is unfamiliar with our earthly ways.

CLYNN: And I suppose you're familiar with her alien ways?

DANNY: I know more than you'll ever know.

MARTHA: Boys! Why don't we all relax? *(To Alien/Aunt Jenesa)* Hello far away visitor, it's a pleasure to meet you! I'm Martha. I must say you look wonderful under the moonlight.

ALIEN/AUNT JENESA: *(Mumbles)* Thank you.

# Kudzai Mhangwa

## Come by Here

MARTHA: Awww you're welcome... I like her already.

BON-BON: What brings you to Earth?

DANNY: Amateurs! You can't be asking her questions like that. Everybody knows that they're here to usher us into the new millennium. A new world order. *(Pushes Bon-Bon and Martha away from Alien/Aunt Jenesa)* Now move away!

BON-BON: *(Sarcastically)* Aren't you just a gentleman?

DANNY: This isn't about you Bon-Bon, it's about the entire Earth's future. *(To Alien/Aunt Jenesa)* Now, my name is...

ALIEN/AUNT JENESA: *(Mumbles)* You.

DANNY: No, my name is...

ALIEN/AUNT JENESA: *(Mumbles anxiously)*

*Alien/Aunt Jenesa tries to run away from Danny, but Danny blocks all of her attempts by jumping in front of her.*

CLYNN: She clearly doesn't want to talk to you.

MARTHA: Have you two met by any chance?

DANNY: Of course not, this is my first alien encounter.

CLYNN: *(To Bon-Bon)* I find that very hard to believe.

BON-BON: She seems to know you pretty well though.

*Alien/Aunt Jenesa tries one more time to run away from Danny, but he grabs her.*

DANNY: I'm not letting you go!

CLYNN: She can take you back to the mothership and you can finally go to space.

DANNY: *(Struggling with Alien/Aunt Jenesa)* Share your secrets with me.

MARTHA: Stop hurting her.

BON-BON: She's a living creature like me and you.

*Bon-Bon and Martha pull Danny away from Alien/Aunt Jenesa.*



# Kudzai Mhangwa

## Come by Here

DANNY: Hey... don't let her get away! That's my ten-year-old brother's science project and my ticket to the Nobel Prize!

BON-BON: You just attacked another living creature. The only place you should be is the dog pound.

MARTHA: All nature should be respected, even if it doesn't make sense to us.

DANNY: It doesn't make sense to you! This makes a whole lot of sense to me! If you weren't here to disturb me, I wouldn't have these problems, but you had to come in between me and my mission. A weird girl who has been singing campfire songs and a sleazy couple on the run!

CLYNN: (*Grinding his knuckles*) That's it buddy, it's time to tango.

BON-BON: Go for it honey!

MARTHA: (*To Danny*) I would be the voice of reason but not today.

DANNY: (*To Clynn*) Bring it on!

*Martha and Bon-Bon move away from Clynn and Danny.*

ALIEN/AUNT JENESA: Alright, alright! Stop already. (*Removes alien mask*)

DANNY: Aunt Jenesa!

CLYNN: She's human! (*To Danny*) You're related?

DANNY: That's my Aunt Jenesa.

MARTHA: I know her! She's the woman who went missing. The press went crazy over her story.

BON-BON: Looks like we've got competition for the front page cover Clynn.

AUNT JENESA: You can have it! This wasn't supposed to happen. I wasn't supposed to get discovered, most of all by you!

DANNY: But I've missed you so much! I was going to bust the story of the mysterious spaceship and I wanted you to be proud of me.

AUNT JENESA: Congratulations! You've uncovered the story of the alien and that alien... is me.

MARTHA: So you've been living in space for nearly four months?

# Kudzai Mhangwa

## Come by Here

AUNT JENESA: Yes. It's not that bad, they have an entire civilisation up there.

BON-BON: (Sly) You don't say.

AUNT JENESA: Everything you need is up there. Apart from my favourite pickles! That's why I come back once a week to stock up.

DANNY: So, after all these weeks of endless worry, you've been living in space all along?

AUNT JENESA: Anything to get away from you.

DANNY: What have I ever done to offend you?

AUNT JENESA: Let me not mince my words. I strongly detest you. You're a disgrace to the family name! Running around looking for aliens like a maniac. So when one day the Frank Sinatra of aliens arrived at my front door and asked if I wanted the adventure of a lifetime, I said yes.

DANNY: But this is proof that I was right! They do exist.

AUNT JENESA: Yes they do, and there is a very handsome one waiting for me on Planet XY.

DANNY: It's time for the truth to be revealed. I'm going to be rich!

MARTHA: And turn this world upside down in the process.

BON-BON: I'm always in for a quick buck, but this is too scary.

DANNY: This is the dawn of a new era! You're fools not to see it!

AUNT JENESA: The aliens want nothing to do with you and your planet. They only come here on vacation, sort of like going to the zoo. These are peaceful beings that've created a paradise for themselves.

CLYNN: Is there anything we can do to make this up to you?

AUNT JENESA: Well... (Looks at Danny)

*Danny looks around and sees that the others are looking at him. Aunt Jenesa jumps Danny. Bon-Bon, Clynn and Martha then help her with tying Danny up. Bon-Bon takes off a belt she is wearing and Martha takes off her scarf or headband, which are then used to tie up Danny's legs and hands. Clynn takes out a handkerchief and stuffs it in Danny's mouth.*

AUNT JENESA: That should do it!

MARTHA: Do you think it's safe to leave him here?

# Kudzai Mhangwa

## Come by Here

AUNT JENESA: He's no harm.

CLYNN: What if he tells the police?

AUNT JENESA: And say what? I was ambushed in the woods by my aunt from Venus. They'll never believe him. *(Aside)* Even if it is the truth.

BON-BON: Well that solves the mystery of aliens visiting Earth. *(To Martha)* How about we help you find your camp?

CLYNN: We can give you a ride when we get out of here.

AUNT JENESA: How about I help you find your campsite? I have a spaceship that can scan this area in seconds.

MARTHA: That would be wonderful.

BON-BON: You know Aunt Jenesa, this Earth is getting a little cramped for Clynn and I. It would be nice to explore the galaxy and its endless riches.

AUNT JENESA: An intergalactic Bonnie and Clyde love story. I love it! Come on!

MARTHA: And we get to ride the spaceship! We can sing campfire songs!

BON-BON: If you want to stay here with him, go ahead and start singing.

MARTHA: Yes ma'am.

*Exit Bon-Bon, Clynn and Martha. Danny struggles on the ground. Aunt Jenesa removes the handkerchief from his mouth.*

AUNT JENESA: Spit it out.

DANNY: What about your pickles?

AUNT JENESA: I've decided to get them somewhere you don't know about.

DANNY: Aunt Jenesa no!

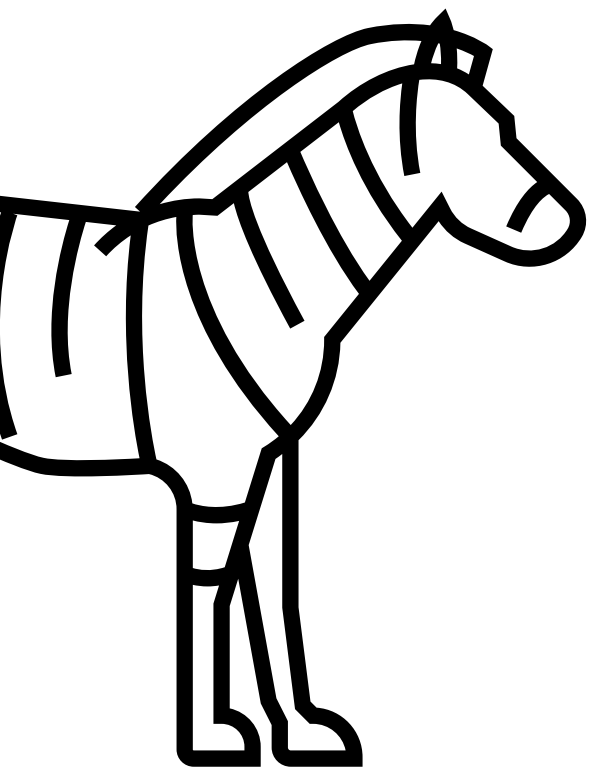
AUNT JENESA: Tell your mother her sister-in-law said "Hi".

*Exit Aunt Jenesa. Bright light shines on stage and the sound of the spaceship is heard.*

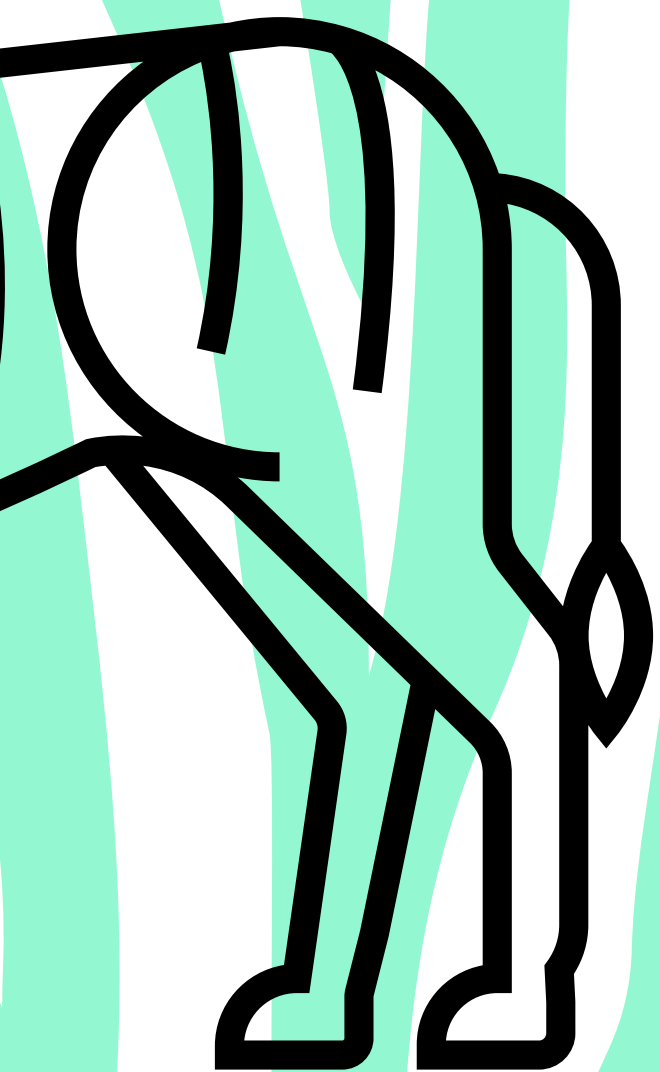
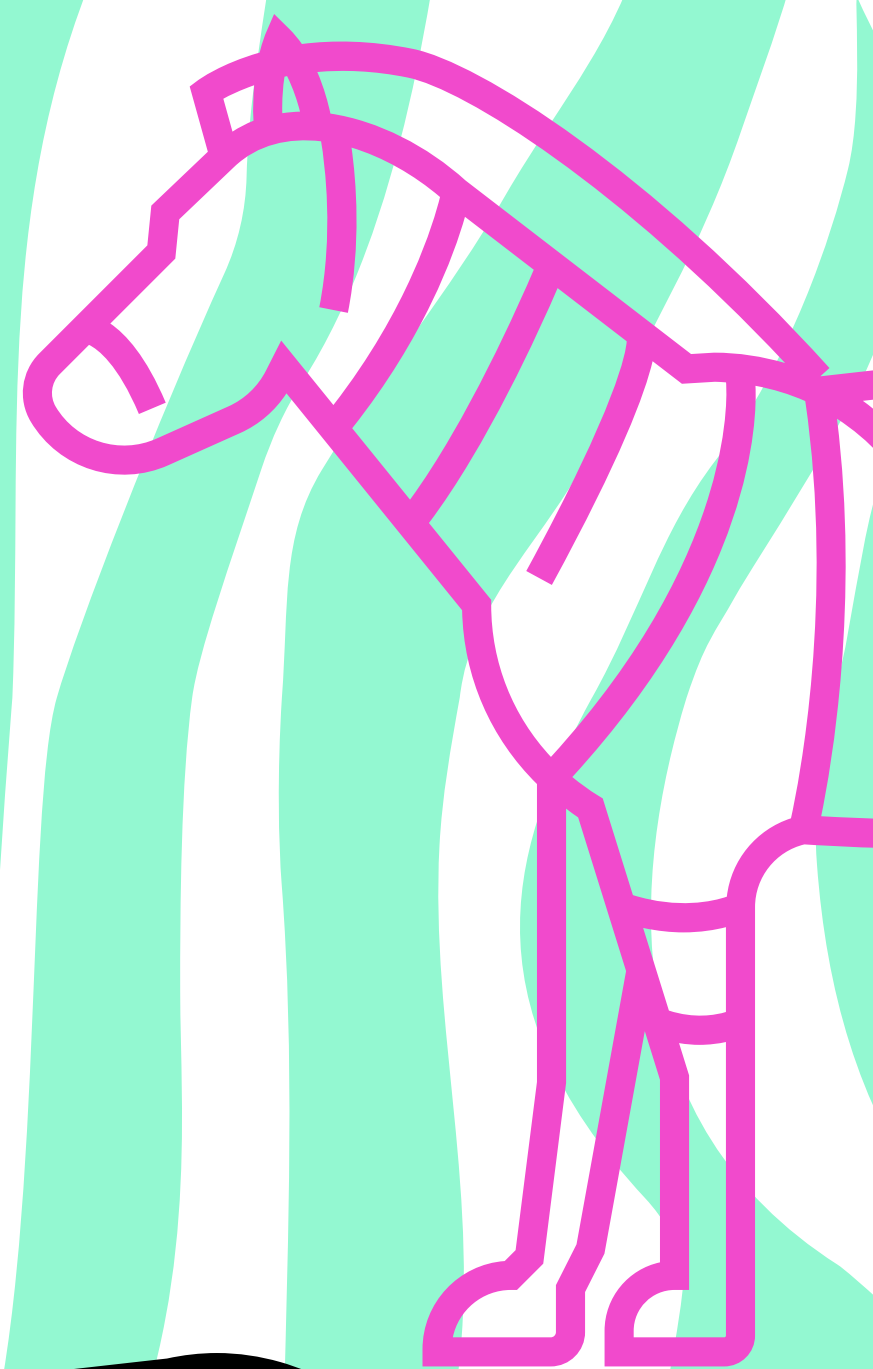
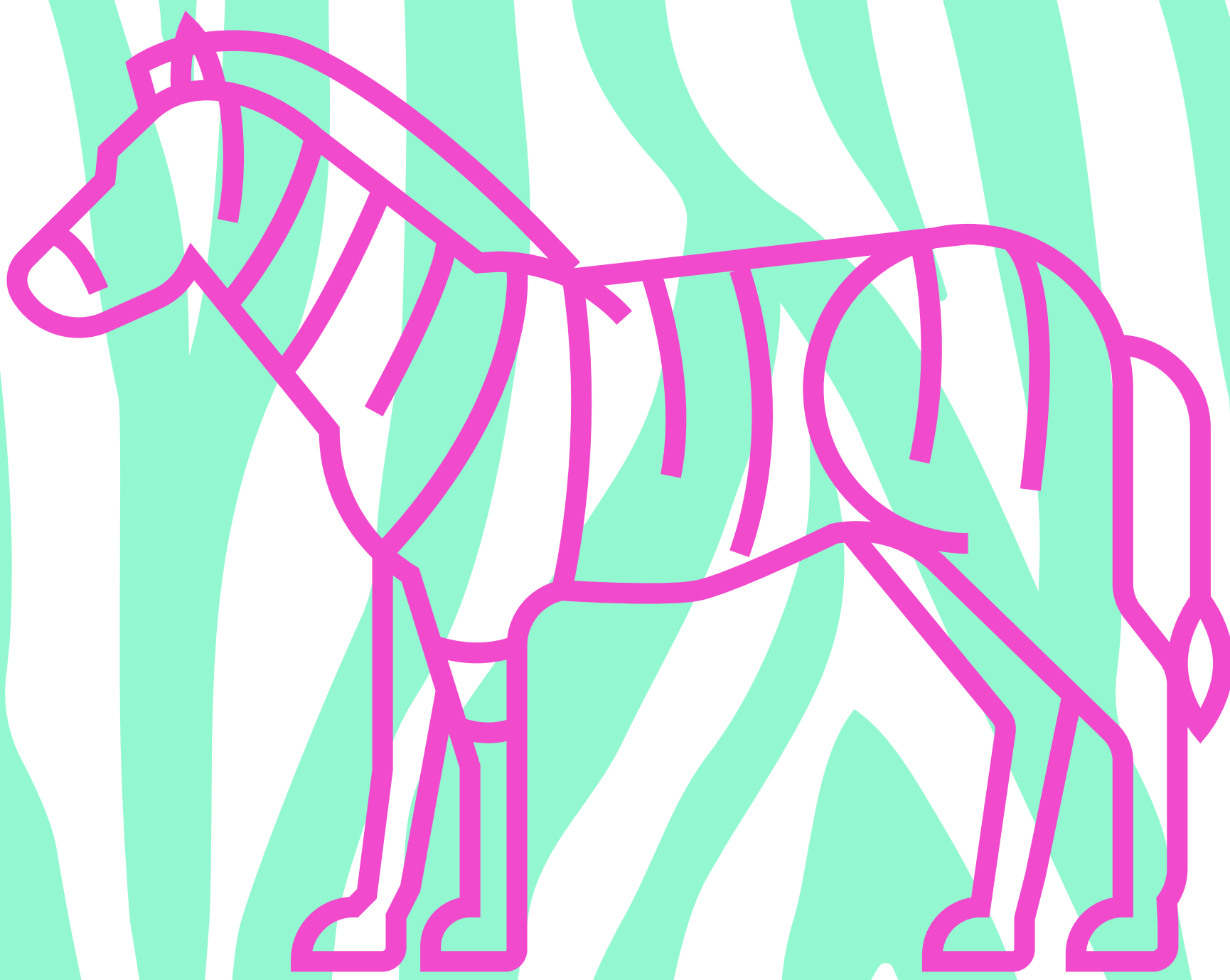
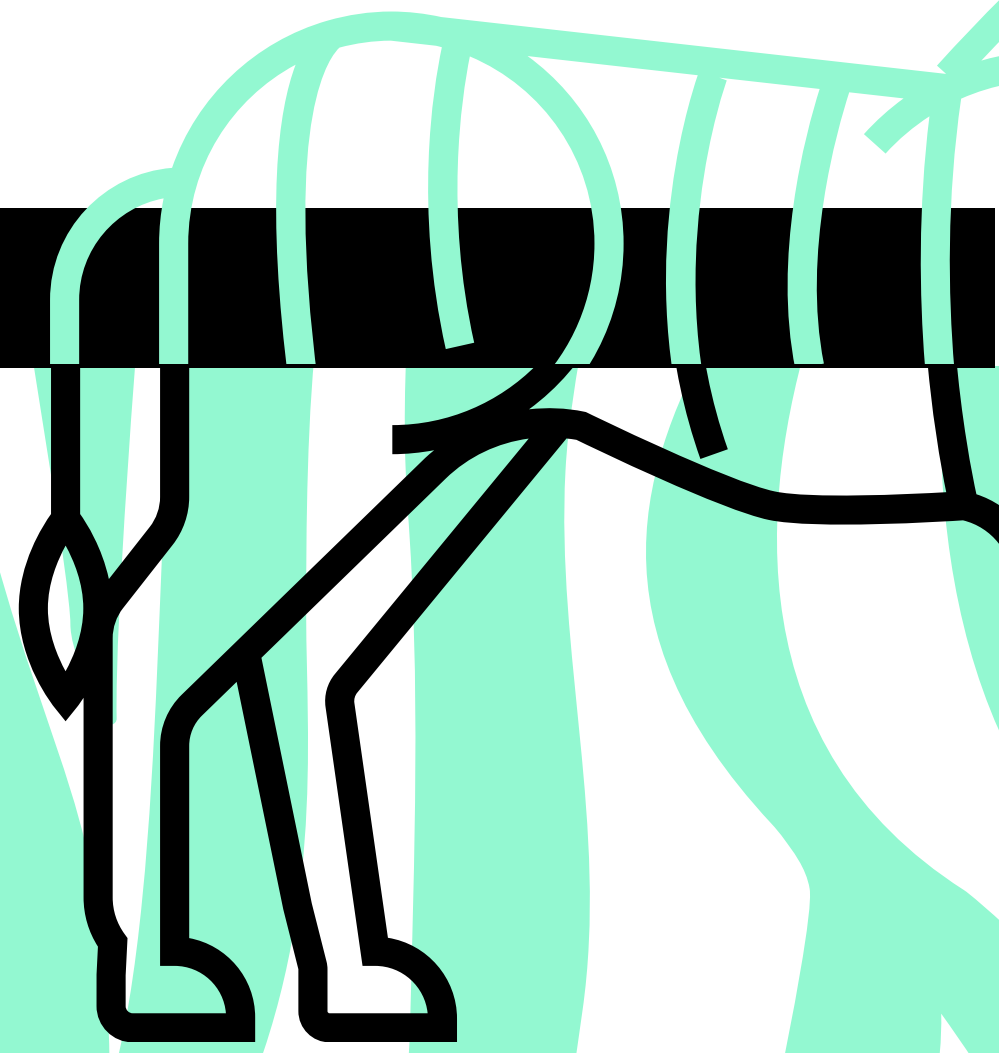
DANNY: What now? *(Begins singing 'Khumbaya' until)* I hate that song!



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# VISUAL STORIES





# Olabode Ajiboye



*Olabode Ajiboye is a graduate in mechanical engineering at the University of Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria. He works as a freelance illustrator for storyboards and comic books, and an animator in the growing animation industry in Nigeria.*

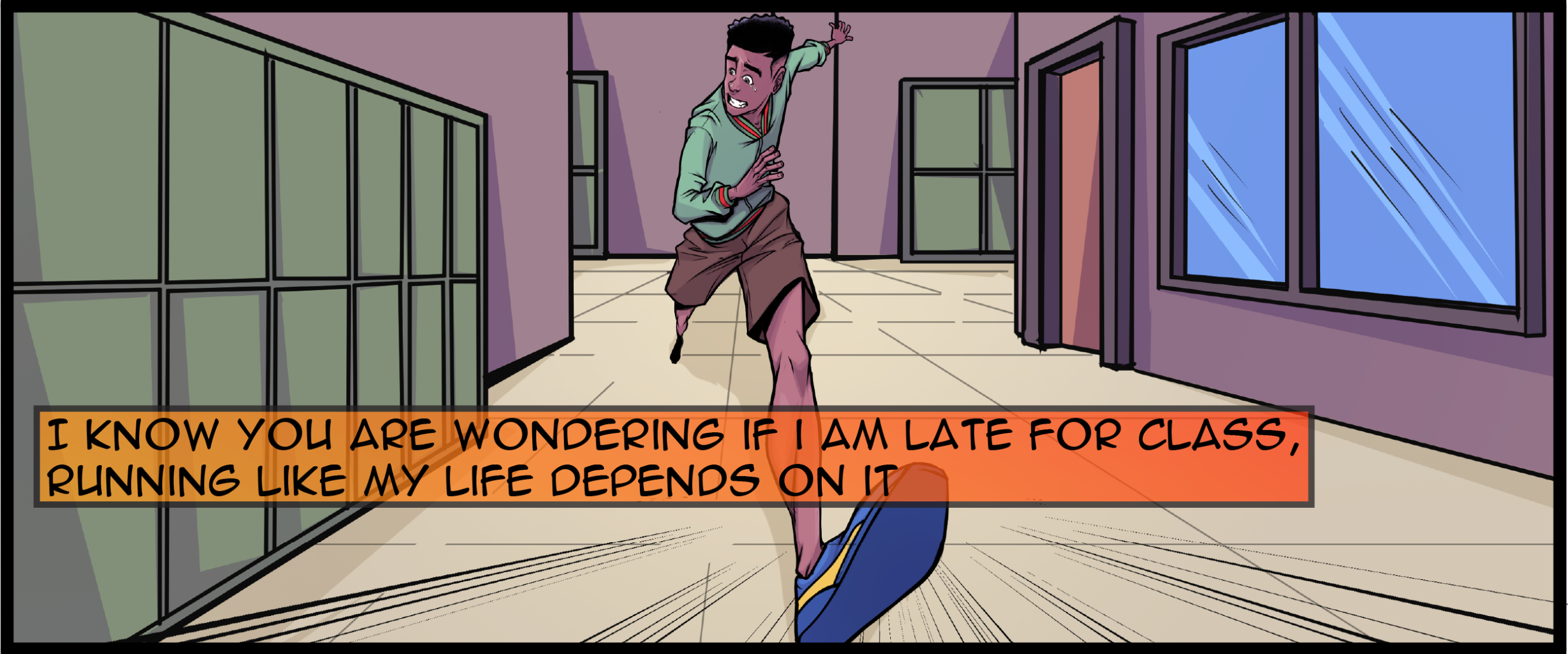
*Olabode is trying to carve a niche by telling stories of African characters and superheroes far from the stereotype of flying men in spandex of the west and rural village settings believed to be African. He takes this approach because he believes nothing stays the same forever, and even culture evolves.*





*OLABODE AJIBOYE*





I KNOW YOU ARE WONDERING IF I AM LATE FOR CLASS, RUNNING LIKE MY LIFE DEPENDS ON IT



WELL IT ACTUALLY DOES...

I'M SO DEAD

PLUS I'M NOT LATE I AM FLEEING FROM CLASS



FOR THE SON OF A BOXER I'M ALL BRAINS AND NO BRAWN

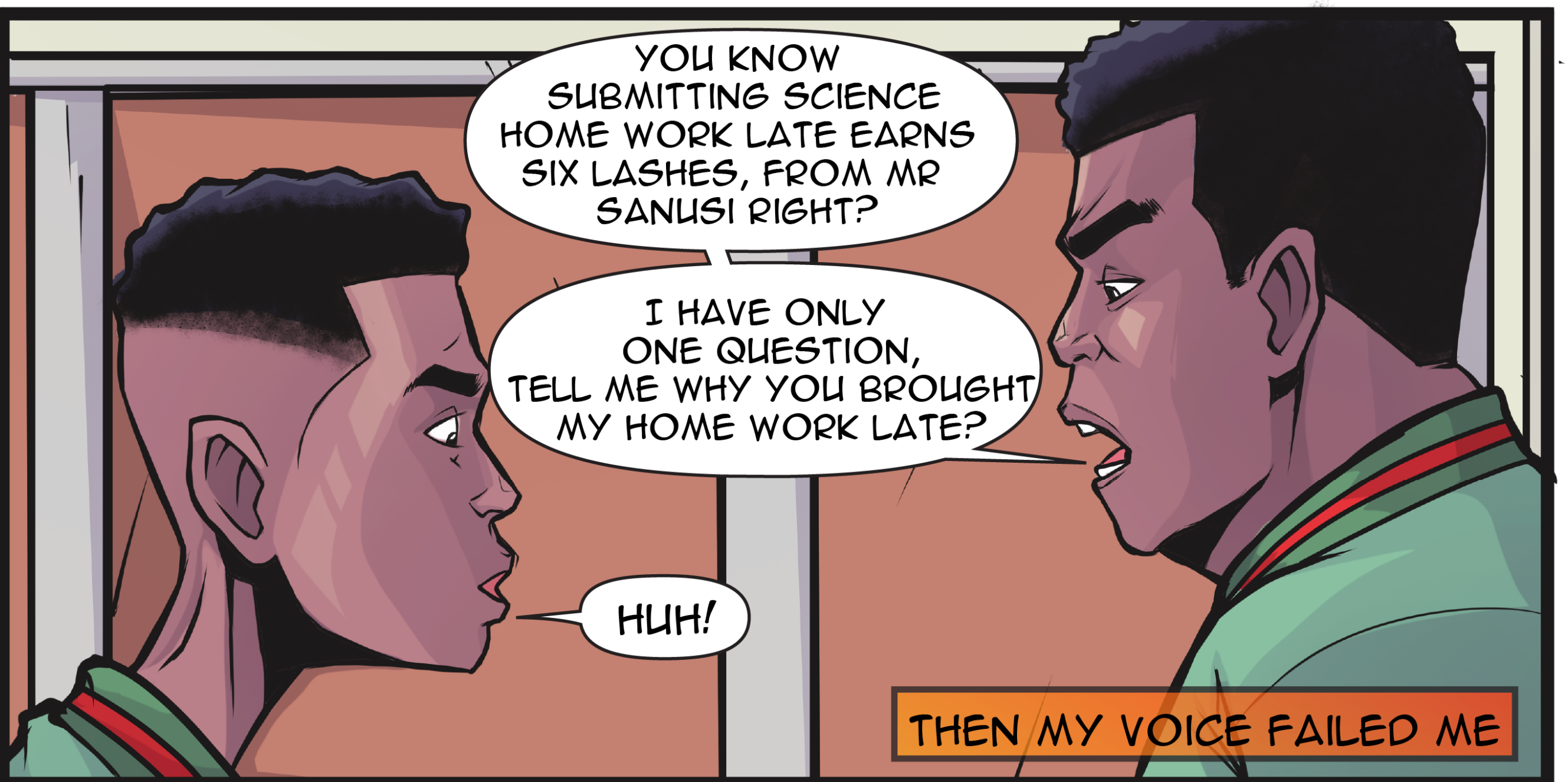
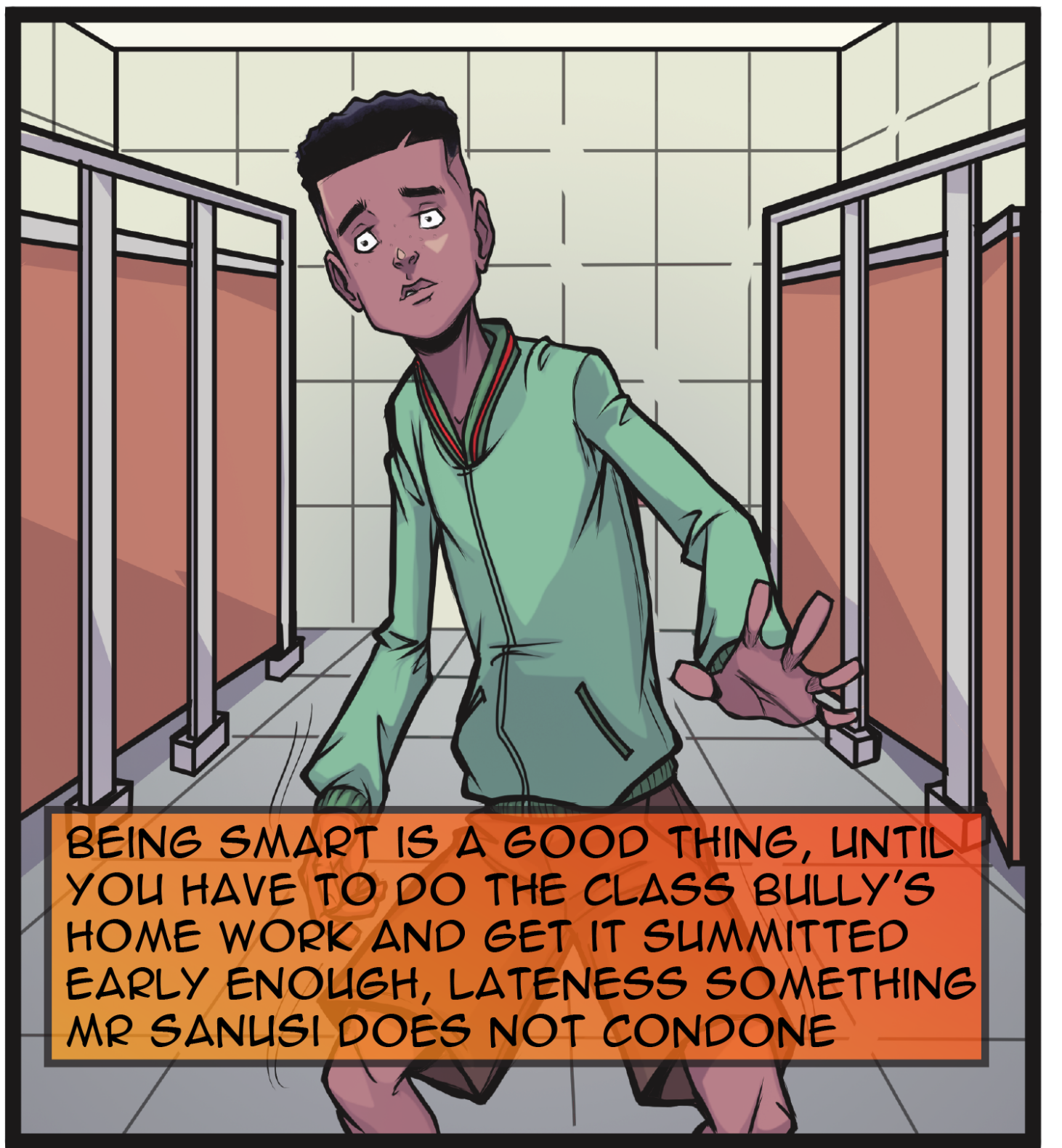


GOTCHA!

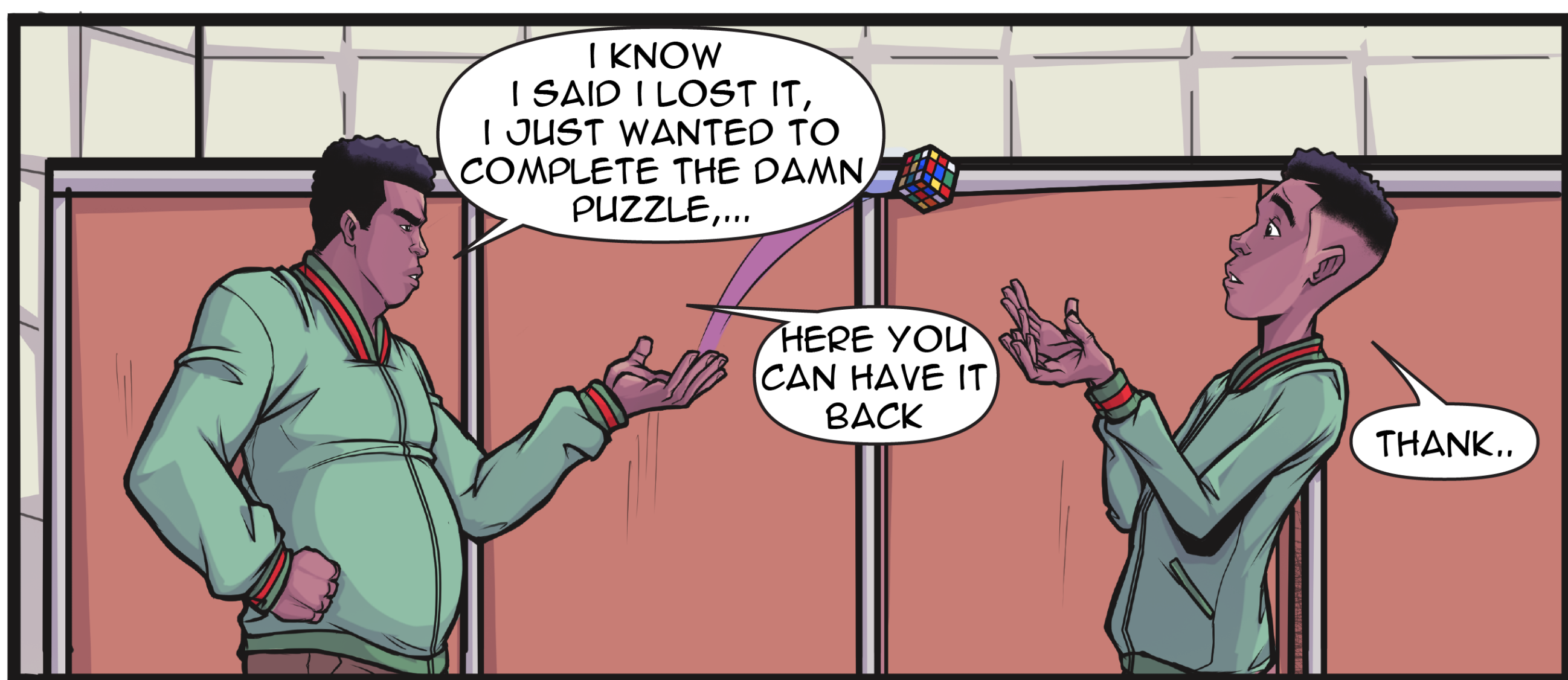
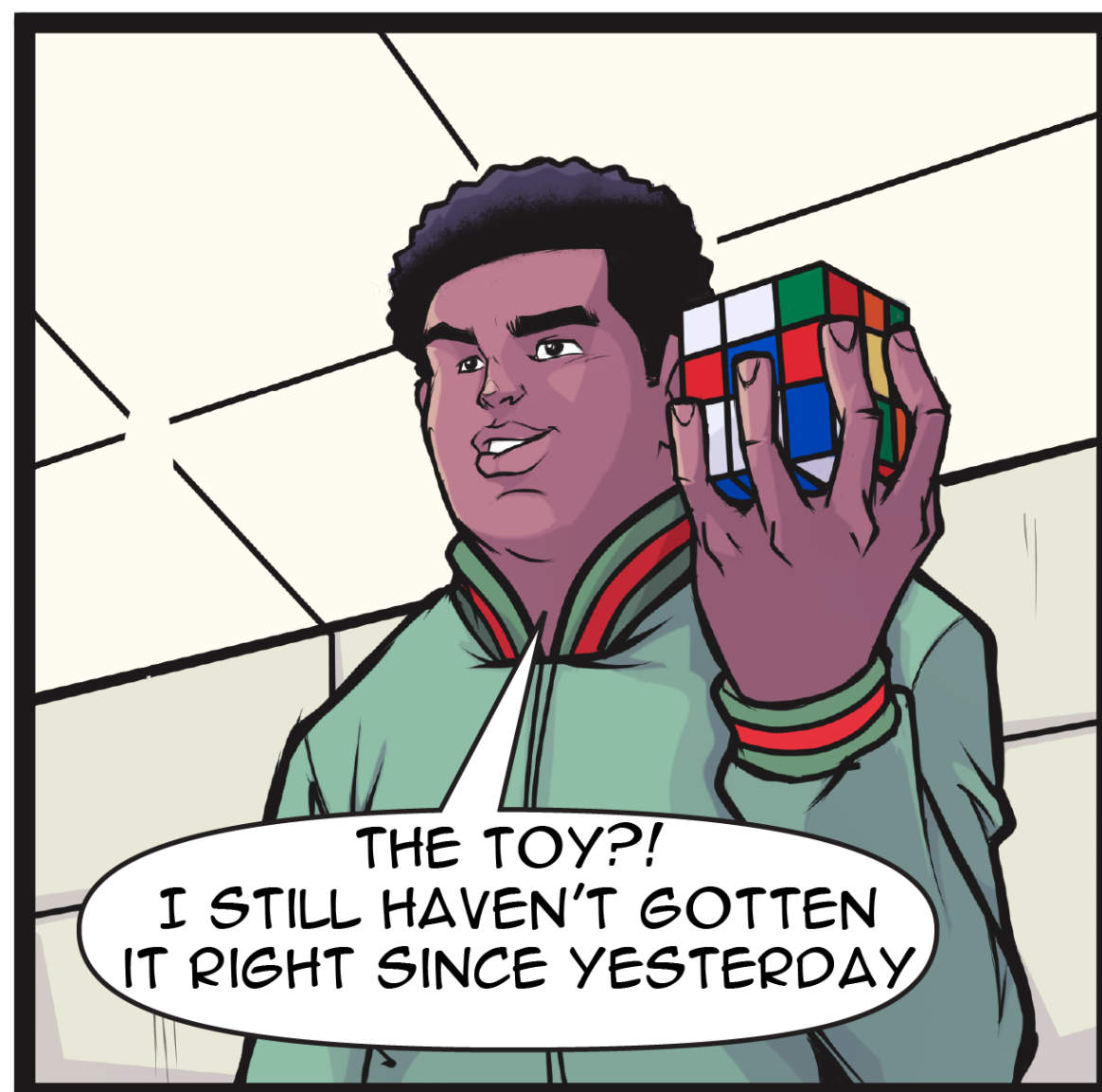
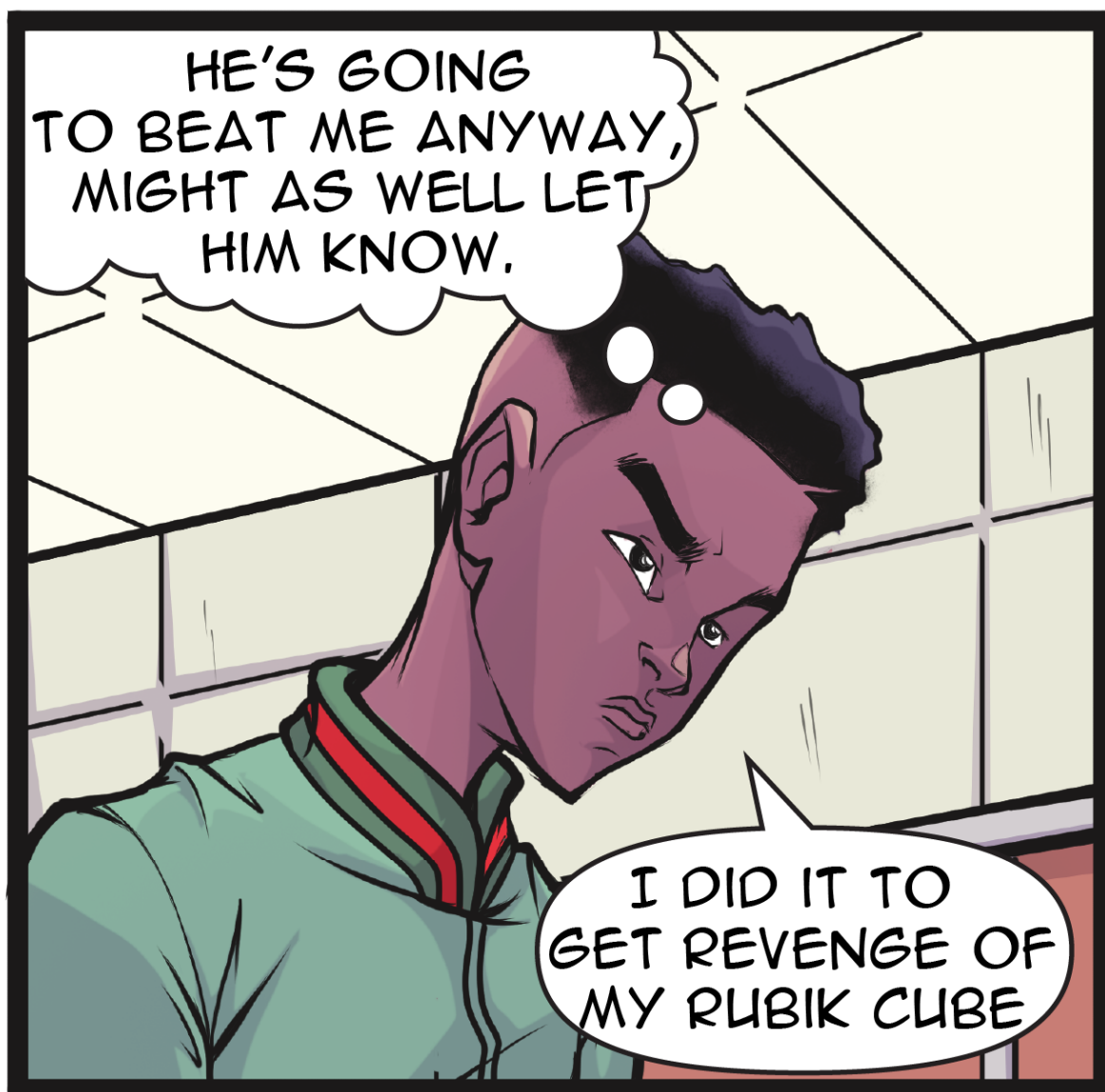
CHIBUZOR WILL KILL ME!

DON'T MAKE ME COME IN THERE!











THE GOOD THING ABOUT BEING UNCONSCIOUS IS YOU CAN PRETEND YOU ARE NOT THERE

MOST KIDS WILL BE GLAD TO SEE THEIR DADS IN MY STATE BUT US! WE ARE DIFFERENT

THE POUNDING IN MY HEAD FEELS LIKE CHIBUZOR'S STILL HITTING ME

I KNOW YOU DIDN'T FALL AGAIN, THE QUESTION IS WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO ABOUT YOUR FEAR?

MY MOM WOULD BE YELLING AT THE PRINCIPAL TO PUNISH CHIBUZOR BY NOW, IF SHE WAS THE ONE AROUND NOW,... THAT WILL ONLY GET ME MORE BEATINGS FROM HIM

MY DAD TREATS EVERYTHING LIKE A BOLT, FACE YOUR OPPONENT AND PUNCH THEM INTO SUMMISSION.

I WON'T RAISE A WHIMP!

MY MOM DOES NOT LIKE THE IDEA OF ME THROWING A PUNCH... THIS I'LL HAVE TO DEAL WITH MYSELF.



IT WASN'T ALWAYS LIKE THIS. THEY USED TO BE BEST FRIENDS, UNTIL....

HE LOST HIS BOXING LICENSE, AFTER HE BEAT UP ONE OF THE JUDGES AT HIS LAST BOUT

PLEASE!  
STOP ARGUING

HE HATES SPLIT DECISIONS  
AND BELIEVE HE WAS ROBBED

WHAT?!

NOW HE'S LOST HIS  
BEST FRIEND

LEAVE IF YOU  
WANT TO BUT  
YOU'RE NOT TAKING  
MY SON

I HAVE  
EVERYTHING  
I NEED

CAN'T BELIEVE SHE WOULD LEAVE ME TOO

TO BE CONTINUED



# Gary Louw



*Gary Louw grew up in Richards Bay, South Africa where he was raised in the shadow of a heavily religious community. After renouncing his faith in favour of Atheism, Gary garnered negative attention from dogmatic Christians in his area.*

*His artwork is a reflection of the difficulty, censorship and persecution he experienced as an outspoken atheist during his youth. It is also a consideration of the place of atheists in contemporary South Africa and the world at large. Visit his website <https://garyglouw.art> or Instagram @gary.louw*



### **‘New Comedy’ in a Landscape of Quasi-Theocracy**

Conventionally, Ronald McDonald had become a symbol of a perverted messiah in the ‘Comedy’ drawings. However, now within the context of the fight for freedom of speech, he becomes a symbol of the protection of that very right – thus abandoning the role of anti-hero in favour of being a pure protagonist. Accordingly, he is shown in elegant yet powerful regalia in triumph over a generic foe (in this setting representing the draconian limitations put on free speech by religion – at least within the context of the utterly vacuous ‘offence’ that constitutes blasphemy).

The latest addition to the series departs from such discussions of freedom of speech and, in place of that, considers the motivations driving the origin of religious interpretations of mortality, specifically, the interplay between indoctrination, fear, patriarchy and fiction in the concoction and promulgation of the idea of the afterlife and its arbiters. This drawing is entitled “The Ascension of the Fictional Mortality” and is an appropriation of “The Assumption of Mary” by Peter Paul Rubens. Like the other entries into the ‘New Comedy’ series, this drawing borrows imagery from the previous series to continue the established narrative, particularly, as the Virgin Mary is replaced with Ronald’s mother Death (as featured in “Natus Ex Fascino Mortem”, “Aeterna Cena”, “Deus est Mortuus”, and “Pretium Anima”). This, along with the other drawings, binds both the ‘New’ and ‘Divine’ comedies into a single narrative.

Even though only three artworks are discussed in this essay, the ‘New Comedy’ series is (by design) an indefinitely long inquiry and critique of largely unquestioned religious ideas (as dissected from the perspective of an atheist). I have purposefully refrained from providing complete rationales of these works to encourage readers to view the accompanying images and derive their own interpretations. As per usual, I take comfort in the fact that no matter how vitriolic criticism of such open and untempered expression may be, the ideas embodied by the artworks are indelible within both composition and memory.

It is a most peculiar phenomenon when people who share a null intersection with the opinions of others insist that their ideas be imposed, regardless of the commonality (or lack thereof) of their belief. This manifests itself most potently in the realms of religious observance but particularly at the interface between religious and secular society. It is at this interface where the imposition of religiously motivated opinion often occurs in spaces where there is no consensus that such opinions should be respected.

Examples thereof are numerous and range from the unsolicited propagation of ideas, such as the claim that blasphemy is universally reproachable, all the way through to poorly understandable actions, such as the protest of iconoclastic art or deviant (yet innocuous) ideas. This struggle between religious and secular society has become a focal point of the ‘New Comedy’ series of drawings (in large part due to the magnification of such friction through the controversy that ensued from my previous body of work). The ‘New Comedy’ is intended to follow from the ‘Divine Comedy’ series of drawings and continue the narrative contained therein (indefinitely).

### **‘New Comedy’ in a Landscape of Quasi-Theocracy**

Following from the ‘Divine Comedy’ (which concerned itself with a critique of the self-serving and capitalistic incentives of organised religion), the ‘New Comedy’ serves to continue and expand the discussion put forth by its predecessor by more carefully considering the interface of secular demography with its religious counterpart and the frictions that arise through differences in social, moral and metaphysical juxtaposition. As a whole, this renders the ‘Divine Comedy’ and ‘New Comedy’ series a novel and much-needed popularisation of secular ideas in an environment where they are routinely drowned out by infrequently relevant and even less frequently questioned religious canons.

At the time of this piece’s writing, there have been three additions to the ‘New Comedy’ series. These artworks (which, unlike their predecessors, are appropriated from the Baroque movement instead of the Renaissance period) deal with some of the aforementioned ideas, namely, the reclamation of artistic integrity in the face of dogmatic opposition, the triumph of art over pseudo-theocratic doctrine, as well as a more surrealistic exploration of the link between religious ideas of mortality and fiction. They form the start of an indefinitely long series of drawings that, unreservedly, ask questions some may consider blasphemous.

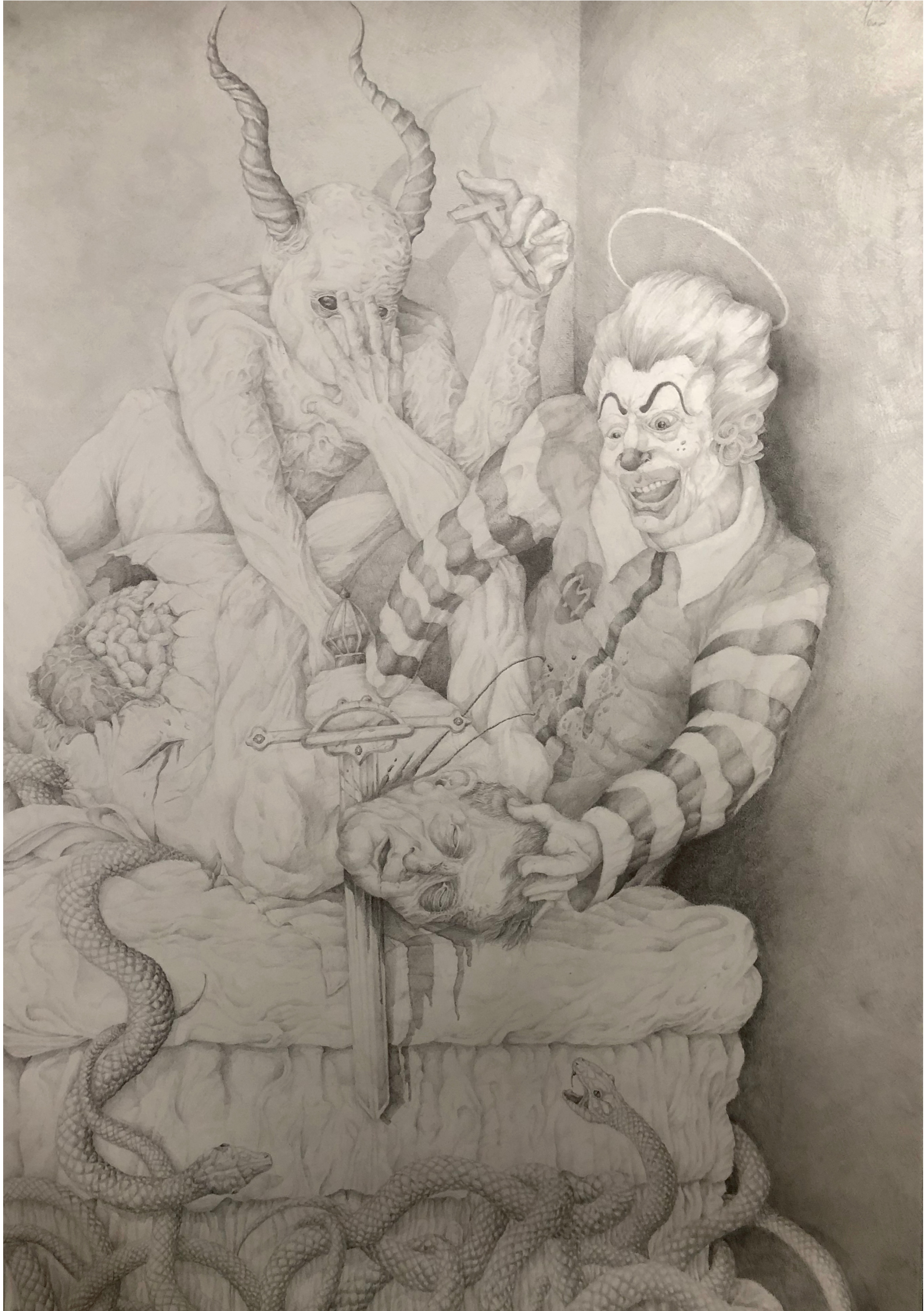
Firstly, “Ronald Slaying Anderson” (100cm x 70cm) is an appropriation of the Baroque painting, “Judith Slaying Holofernes” by Artemisia Gentileschi. This artwork was the first piece inducted into the series and depicts Ronald McDonald (a familiar character carried over from the ‘Divine Comedy’ series) and a nondescript, demonic figure leaning over a third (also potentially familiar) character who is having his head sawn off. Much like the subtext of the original painting (where Gentileschi painted herself decapitating an acquaintance who had sexually assaulted her) the subtext of this drawing adopts a similar interplay between Ronald McDonald and a symbol of censorship. This drawing, therefore, becomes a statement of defiance in the face of religiously motivated censorship.

Following this drawing is “The Fall of the Theocratic Agents” (100cm x 70cm), which is an appropriation of “The Fall of the Rebel Angels” by Giordano Luca. This piece features a momentary (and so far singular) role reversal of the symbology of my drawings.



Gary Louw

**‘New Comedy’ in a Landscape of Quasi-Theocracy**



“Ronald Slaying Anderson”  
Gary Louw



Gary Louw

## ‘New Comedy’ in a Landscape of Quasi-Theocracy



“The Fall of the Theocratic Agents”  
Gary Louw



Gary Louw

**‘New Comedy’ in a Landscape of Quasi-Theocracy**

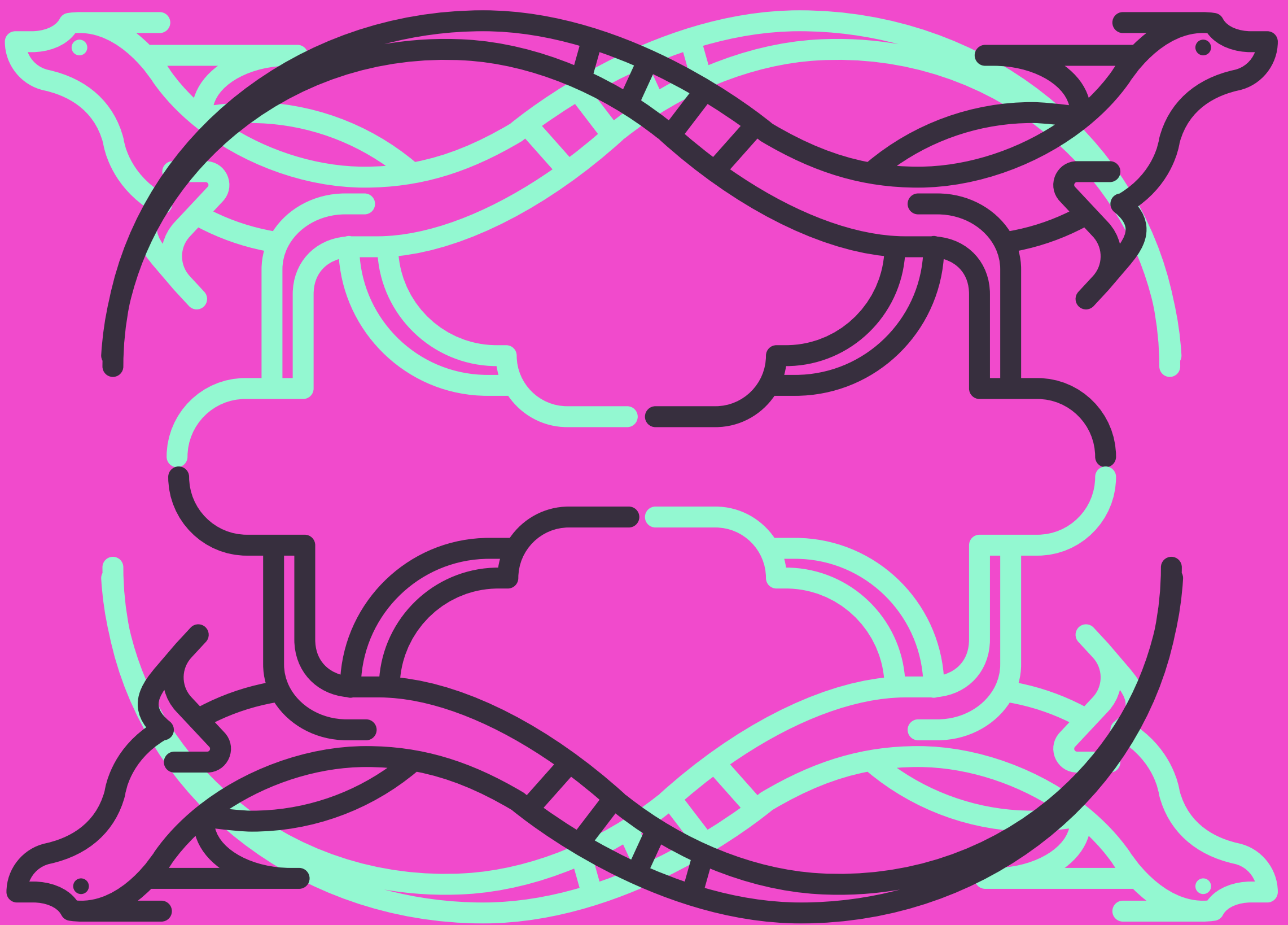


"The Ascension of the Fictional Mortality"  
Gary Louw



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# TRANSLATIONS







# Kaushar Edoe Bibi Auleear

*Kaushar is from Riviere du Rempart, Mauritius. She is 24 years old and started writing and performing poetry in 2019. Mauritian Kreole is her mother tongue and preferred language for performance. She also writes in English, French and Urdu. Kaushar has had several opportunities to perform, including on stage at a national slam competition in Mauritius in which she was part of the winning team; at the Festival Kreol, a national celebration of Mauritian culture; and for the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation.*

*A collection of Kaushar's poems in English are presented in the poetry section. Here we present two more of her poems, one in Mauritian Kreole ('Lam dan mo lekor') and another in Urdu ('Ulfat'), both with English translations. The translations are by the author.*

# Kaushar Edoo Bibi Auleear

## Lam dan mo lekor

Lam dan mo lekor laflam vengens dan mo leker  
Zot bles mo lam me mo pa pu bes mo lame  
Mo pu kontinie marse avek kouronn konfians lor mo latet  
Lizur lanwit zot fors mwa pu travay vit vit  
Soufrans kri monn avale dan plas enn bousse diri  
Fardo diss fwa pli lourd ki mo lekor banla finn mete lor mo ledò  
Donn mwa enn bout dipain samem ti mo demann  
Na pa gagn dipain isi zot finn reponn  
Si to anvi viv to bizin mort toulezur  
Si to anvi ouver lizie dimin to bizin debat ziska kok criye gramatin  
Zarm dan zot lame larm dan mo lizie  
Mo lame lipie pe kontinie roule avek lessens frayer ki pe deborde dan mo leker  
Aret donn mo lekor mizer  
Aprè mo lamor mo lam pu touzur la  
Pu temoign mo zistwar avek glwar  
Hier dissan ti fann lor later  
zordi lank pu fann lor paz pu ki lorizinn re fer sirfass  
Lor losean indien  
To enn morisien ki fier so rasinn to lexisans temoign to lorizin  
To dissan rouz me to lam ena 4 kouler rouz ble zonn ver

## Soul in my body

Soul in my body  
Fire of Vengeance in my heart  
They hurt my soul but I won't lose hope  
I will walk crowned with confidence  
Night and day they have forced me to work  
I have swallowed pain instead of rice  
Burden ten times heavier than my body on my back  
One piece of bread was my only desire  
You won't get bread here they replied  
If you want to live, you must die everyday  
If you want to open your eyes tomorrow, you must struggle till morning  
Arms in their hands  
Tears in my eyes  
My hands and feet are still working with the fear fuelled in my heart  
Stop torturing me  
My soul will still be alive after my death  
To prove my pain with pride  
Yesterday blood was on the earth  
Today ink will be on my page so that the past resurfaces  
On the Indian Ocean  
You are a Mauritian proud of your roots  
Your existence proves your origin  
Your blood is red but your soul has 4 colours  
Red blue yellow green

# Kaushar Edoo Bibi Auleear

## Ulfat

Ulfat aur mohabbat  
Socha tha ke bass yehi hai  
Aapki fitrat  
Itni shiddat se chahaa aap ne meri zaat ko  
Kya baat  
Daad deni paregi aapke dil ki faryaad ko  
Youn mujhe barbaad karoge kabhi  
Ke khushi bass yaad bann ke reh jaaye  
Toote dil ko to sambhaal lete meri jaan  
Magar tooti zameer  
Bikhri zindagi aur  
Behte khoon ko kyunkarr sambhaalein  
Agar yehi hoti hai mohabbat ka muqaam  
To ek kaam sarre aam kijiye  
Mere dil ko qaabu mein karne se pehle  
Mujhe apni asli zaat dikha dijiye  
Apni meethi baaton mein thori si karwaahat mila lijiye  
Mujhe nasheeli nazron se dekhne se pehle  
Apne ghusse ka ek chasska  
Chakhaa lijiye

## Affection

Love is what I thought  
Was your only characteristic  
You loved my self with so much obsession  
Wow  
Praise the desire of your heart  
You destroyed me in such a way that  
Happiness is now only a memory  
I would have controlled my broken heart  
But how can I control my broken self-respect,  
My destroyed life  
And my bleeding body parts  
If this is the destiny of love  
Then do one thing in front of everyone  
Mix some sourness in your sweet talks  
Before looking at me with your mesmerising eyes  
Let me taste your anger





# THE JOURNAL OF AFRICAN YOUTH LITERATURE

Issue 4 submissions open on  
1 March 2021

Poetry  
Short stories  
Plays  
Visual stories  
Essays  
Translations  
Artwork

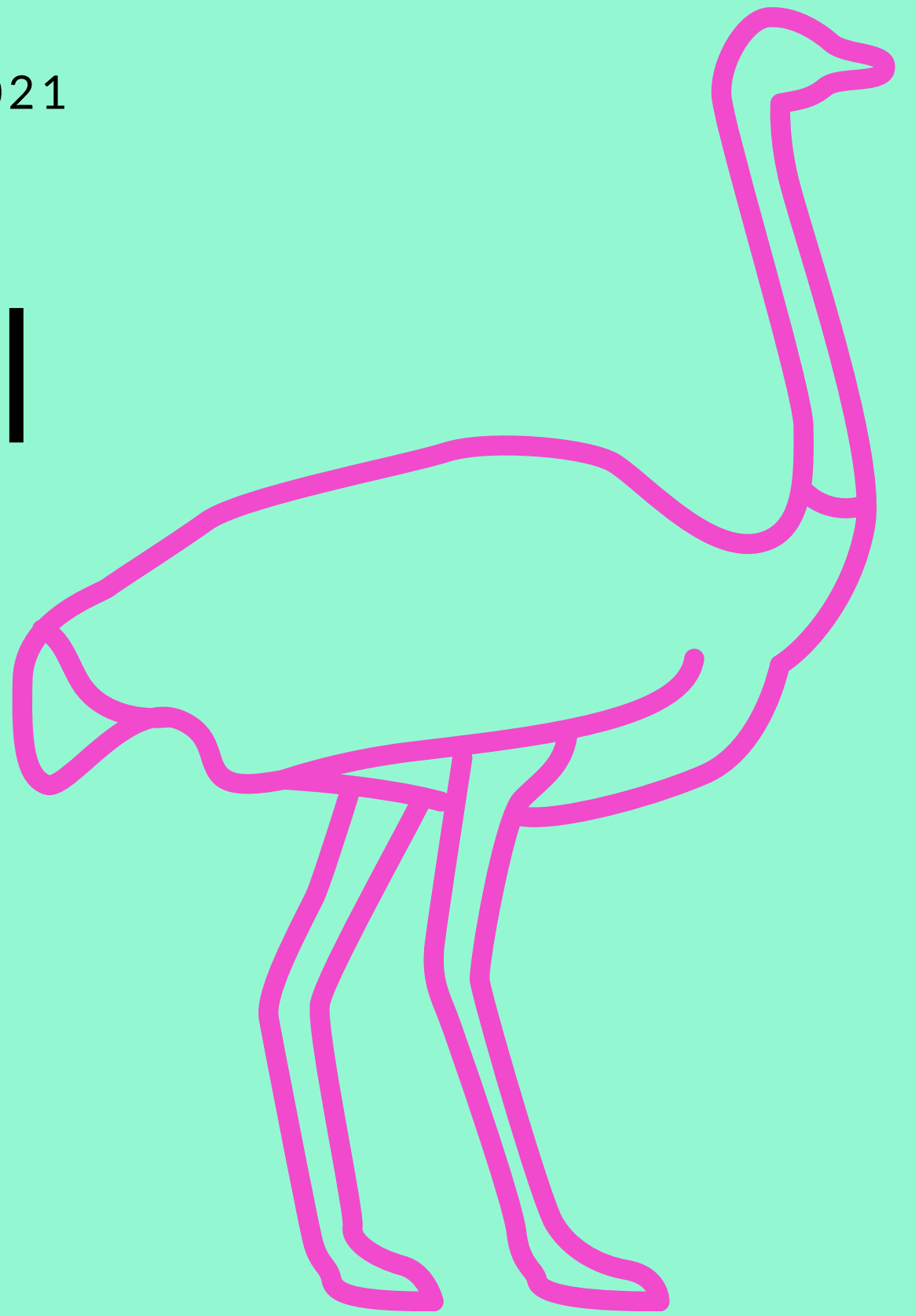
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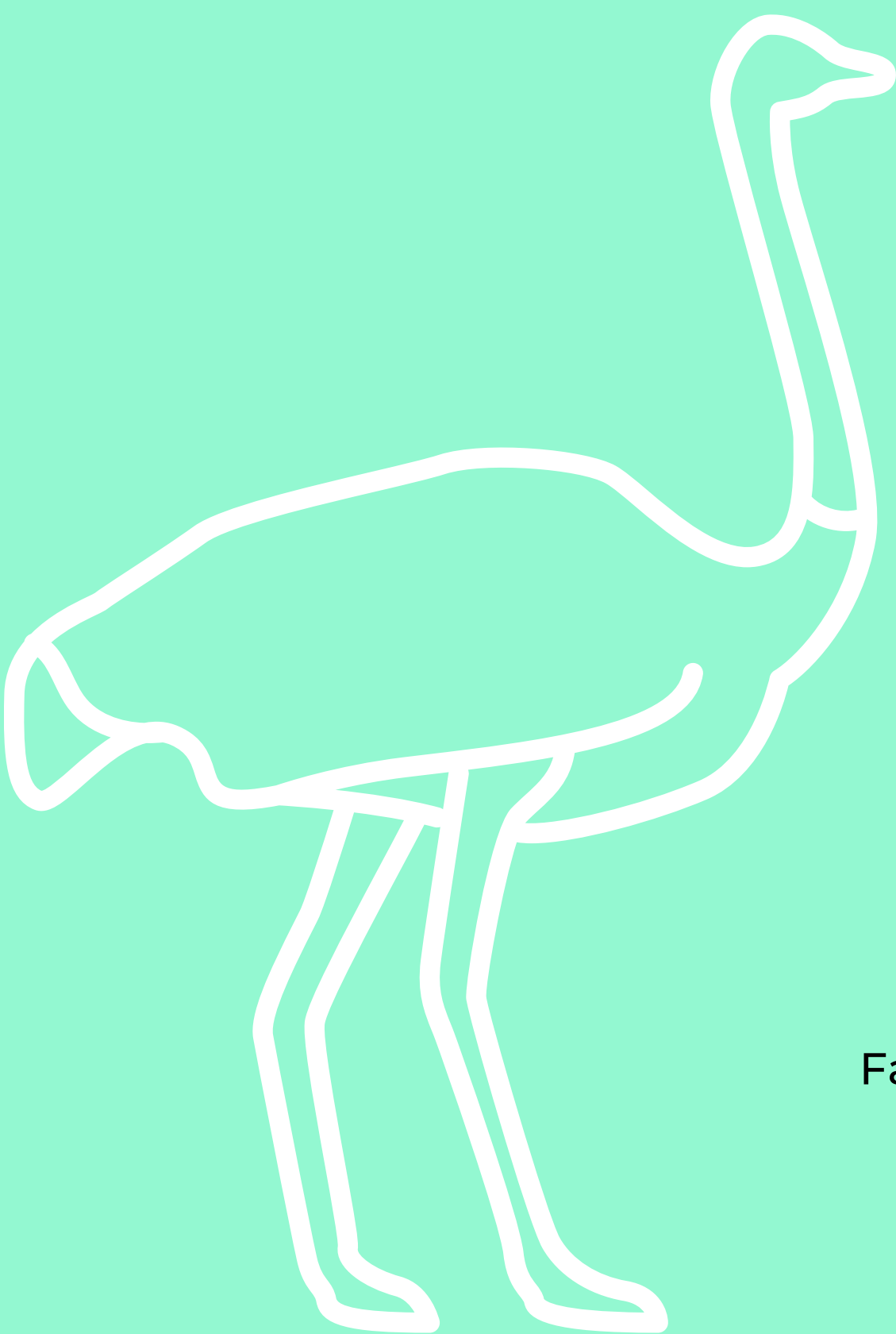


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